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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

GYNESIS AND BODY INSCRIPTION IN THE FICTION OF WILLIAM GIBSON

BY

DARREN S. WERSHLER-HENRY

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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This thesis is dedicated with love to Jennifer Wershler-Henry

ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of four chapters and a short conclusion.

The first chapter is a general introduction to the fiction of William Gibson. The chapter discusses its impact on popular culture, my decision to undertake a feminist reading of Gibson, Alice Jardine's theory of gynesis, and its applicability to Gibson's writing and cyberpunk in general. The latter is demonstrated by short discussions of the stories "Burning Chrome" and "Johnny Mnemonic," from Gibson's short story collection, Burning Chrome.

The second chapter focuses on the following issues in Neuromancer, Gibson's first book-length narrative: gynesis and the relationship between the male protagonist and the female protagonists (the female body as map), gynesis and the relationship between the male protagonist and the Artificial Intelligences, transcendence and mystical experiences (genuine and false), and body inscription and the female characters.

The third chapter, on Count Zero, the sequel to Neuromancer, discusses the following: Count Zero as Gibson's poetics of fiction, body inscription and the male and female protagonists, gynesis and the female body (the female body as map), and various strategies for the empowerment of marginalized women and their success or failure.

The fourth chapter, on Mona Lisa Overdrive, focuses on the following topics: the resistance of female characters to body inscription and gynesis, the development of Gibson's characters from book to book, fragmentation of the self, and transcendence (true and false).

The conclusion reiterates my reasons for writing this thesis, and points to some possibilities for future work on Gibson and other cyberpunk writers.

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Chapter 1

Gynesis and Body Inscription in the Fiction of William Gibson: An Introduction

> [W]omen's bodies have always been postmodern because they have always been targets of a power which, inscribing the text of the flesh, seeks to make of feminine identity something interpellated by ideology, constituted by language, and the site of a "dislocated ego."
>
> -Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, Body Invaders (24)
>
> Like the ancient mystics, the scientists are projecting themselves into a space they cannot hope to reach, at least in human form. They are colonizing the void with a concept.
>
> -Sol Yurick, Metatron

William Gibson is quickly becoming the Jack Kerouac of the Nineties[1]. His books, particularly his first novel, Neuromancer, have as much to do with shaping the emerging sensibilities of the countercultural movement called "cyberpunk" as Kerouac's On the Road had to do with shaping the sensibilities of the Beat Generation. Of the original cyberpunk writers--Bruce Sterling, John Shirley, Lewis Shiner, and the others whose work fills the pages of Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology--Gibson is the first among equals; Bruce Sterling (the editor of the volume and chief cyberpunk polemicist) calls Neuromancer "the quintessential cyberpunk novel" (Mirrorshades xii). Gibson is lauded in a similar manner in Semiotext(e) SF, the latest major contribution to the (sub)genre ("Gibson has sometimes been described as the prototype cyberpunk"--Rucker, Wilson & Wilson 108). Even the major minds of the sixties counterculture champion him as the Next Big Thing: "You are hereby advised to raise your skepticism screens when I proceed to tell you that Gibson has produced nothing less than the underlying myth, the core legend, of the next

stage of human evolution"--Timothy Leary, in the pages of the slick cyberpunk rag Mondo 2000 ("Quark" 56).

The influence of Gibson's writing has spread beyond the bounds of literature, invading all aspects of popular culture like a viral program from one of his stories[2]. Rolling Stone and Spin magazines (the major organs of the old and new guards of the counterculture, respectively) have both run several pieces on/by Gibson[3]. Keyboard magazine published an entire issue on cyberpunk bands[4]. Many of the bands mentioned in the pages of these magazines--Voivod, Sonic Youth, Warren Zevon, Living Color, Ministry, Skinny Puppy--claim Gibson as a major influence, often making allusions to his work in their music. Although their musical styles differ radically, it's the invocation of his name that counts, because it signifies the cutting edge of radical chic. The comic book world is another field of pop culture that has been invaded by the Gibson virus, already having produced a Neuromancer graphic novel and a serial comic called Cyberpunk. Even in academic circles, it is possible to see traces of Gibson's work: Arthur and Marilouise Kroker's books are full of phrases lifted from Gibson, such as "the cyberspace of society" (Kroker & Kroker, Body 11)[5]. As Stewart Brand points out in The Media Lab: Inventing the Future at MIT, Gibson is also having an effect on "real" science: "Every computer science student knows and refers to John Brunner's Shockwave Rider, Vernor Vinge's True Names, (Afterword by Marvin Minsky), William Gibson's Neuromancer" (224). Since the publication of Brand's book, graduate work has been done at MIT based on Gibson's conception of cyberspace (Maddox, "William" 10), and Gibson's vision has become the chief model for Silicon Valley firms racing to produce the first commercially viable virtual reality system (this phenomenon has produced some unintentionally hilarious results: "[Eric] Gullichsen had even registered William Gibson's term

'cyberspace' as an Autodesk trademark, prompting an irate Gibson to apply for trademark registration of the term 'Eric Gullichsen'" (Barlow 38).

In my attempt to assess Gibson's impact on contemporary culture in the previous two paragraphs, I have used Kerouac as a yardstick against Gibson's work, a comparison that will (I hope) provide some sense of scale. I will get to the second purpose of this comparison--which is to illustrate the logic behind my decision to read Gibson's texts through a feminist lens--in a moment. In order to do so, I feel that it is first necessary to make a comment on the relation of Gibson's work to science fiction in general.

Although Gibson is almost always classified as a science fiction writer (if for no other reason than the fact that his books are published by science fiction presses, Ace and Spectrum), this thesis is not going to focus primarily on the relationships between his texts and other science fiction texts. Gibson himself seems to consider labeling his books "science fiction" as a strategy for achieving a wider dissemination of his work:

> As far as I know, I've reached exactly the audience that I would have wanted to reach, plus the science-fiction audience as well. . . . And I think if I'd been writing these books and publishing them as a sort of avant-garde mainstream literature, relatively few people would have heard of them. . . .
>
> (Kelly, "Cyberpunk" 80)

I am not attempting to validate Gibson's work as worthy of study by locating it outside of the (perceived) science fiction "ghetto;" in this age of university courses on science fiction, that is hardly necessary. Rather, my avenue of inquiry is directed more at the influences of "avant-garde mainstream literature" on Gibson's writing.

Gibson is quite open about the fact that many of his major influences are from outside of the SF field[6]. His rationale for incorporating these influences

into his work is consistent with Patrick Parrinder's claim in Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching that "SF is a mode of counter-culture, propagating visions and conceptions of altered modes of life which would normally be ridiculed or dismissed by the representatives of orthodoxy" (36). In a conversation with Timothy Leary, Gibson states "I'm deeply influenced by [William S.] Burroughs. . . . he found 50's science fiction and used it like a rusty can opener on society's jugular" (Leary & Gibson 60). Later in the same conversation, Leary says, "there's a tremendous relationship, as you well know, between Neuromancer and [Thomas] Pynchon" (63).

This brings me to the second reason for my initial comparison of Gibson and Kerouac. In many ways, the style and content of the work of both writers is revolutionary. But in some respects, their work actually perpetuates certain insidious kinds of conservatism, whose presences aren't always obvious under all the chrome and flash of The Latest Thing. As mentioned, Gibson's major influences include writers with a strongly male (and frequently mysogynistic) voice, most notably William Burroughs and Thomas Pynchon. Alice Jardine points out in Gynesis that the "radical" techniques of these (and other) major figures in the Postmodern canon are in fact a kind of avoidance of what she sees as a genuinely radical move away from traditional narrative patterns and paradigms of thought:

> In the American [contemporary male] writing, there is a total evasion of those internal spaces [that have been gendered as feminine], an avoidance strategy mediated by technique. The "self" (a current American obsession) may be caught in a network of uncontrollable forces (both social and maternal), but it can avoid fusion with those forces through a sustained cognitive control of and mastery over the signifier: a technical mastery protecting the self from the dangerous power of the signifier.
>
> One of the more obvious examples of this function of technique is the writing of William Burroughs. There, the fear of fusion is, among other things, a fear of association. By

> attempting to avoid association or merging, the modern obsessional neurotic heeds a fundamental injunction not to touch--touching is, in fact, taboo. . . . the refusal of association does not lead to an exploration of the signifier and its internal spaces; it does not lead to transposition, but to the technique of the cut-up, a rearrangement of the textual surface according to a logic that is purely one of semantic isolation. With Burroughs's writing, we are not beyond the sign, we are its masters. (233-34)[7]

I believe that this same tendency exists in Gibson's work, at least partly because of the strong influence writers like Pynchon and Burroughs have had upon his subject matter and his writing style (as Samuel R. Delany points out, the two are really one: "Put in opposition to 'style,' there is no such thing as 'content'"--Delany 21). The work of all three writers deals primarily with the attempts of Man to make sense of a fragmented, chaotic postmodern world, which translates stylistically into heavy usage of the techniques of cut-up and montage--ways of holding the puzzle-pieces of the world up against each other to see if they fit. "In an interview in London, in one of my rare lucid moments, I told this guy that the difference between what Burroughs did and what I did is that Burroughs would just glue the stuff down on the page but I airbrushed it all"--William Gibson (Leary & Gibson 60).

My methodology for exploring Gibson's work is to examine the relationship between it and a major (yet little-considered) element of postmodern male writing: the phenomenon that Alice Jardine has dubbed gynesis, in her book of the same name. "Gynesis: a new kind of writing on the woman's body, a map of new spaces yet to be explored, with 'woman' supplying the only directions, the only images, upon which Postmodern Man feels he can rely" (52). Gynesis is a process that results from postmodernism's questioning of the master narratives of society. What it involves is an attempt to use "woman" as a metaphor to

identify that which remains unknown, that is, the space that is "other" than the (male) subject.

> In general, this [rethinking of master narratives] has brought about, within the master narratives in the West, a vast self-exploration, a questioning and turning back upon their own discourse, in an attempt to create a new space or spacing within themselves for survivals (of different kinds). In France, such rethinking has involved, above all, a reincorporation and reconceptualization of that which has been the master narratives' own "nonknowledge," what has eluded them, what has engulfed them. This other-than-themselves is almost always a "space" of some kind (over which the narrative has lost control), and this space has been coded as feminine, as woman.
> (Jardine, Gynesis 25)

Other feminists have identified this phenomenon as well; the following quotations are from Teresa de Lauretis and Luce Irigaray, respectively:

> The place from where [Derrida] speaks, the locus of his enunciation, is a constantly shifting place within discourse (philosophy), a rhetorical function and construct; and a construct which--call it différance, displacement, negativity, internal exclusion, or marginality--has become perhaps the foremost rhetorical trope of recent philosophical speculation.
> (de Lauretis 31-32)

> Perhaps it is time to return to that repressed entity, the female imaginary. So woman does not have a sex organ? She has at least two of them, but they are not identifiable as ones. Indeed, she has many more. Her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further: it is plural. Is this the way culture is seeking to characterize itself now? Is this the way texts write themselves/are written now?
> (Irigaray 28)

> While she waits for these divine rediscoveries, awoman [sic] serves (only) as a projective map for the purpose of guaranteeing the totality of the system--the excess factor of its "greater than all"; she serves as a geometric prop for evaluating the "all" of the extension of each of its "concepts" including those that are still undetermined, serves as fixed and congealed intervals between their definitions in "language," and as the possibility of establishing individual relationships among these concepts.
> (Irigaray 108)

Although these alternative readings of the phenomenon Jardine calls "gynesis"

do exist, they are not the primary focus of the aforementioned theorists. I have chosen to work chiefly with Jardine's paradigm because it is, to my knowledge, the most detailed exploration of gynesis to date.

Gynesis occurs in both fiction and theoretical writing; the best known examples to date are in the latter category. Take this passage from Roland Barthes' The Pleasure of the Text, entitled "Langue/Tongue" for example:

> No object is in a constant relationship with pleasure (Lacan, à propos of Sade). For the writer, however, this object exists: it is not the language, it is the mother tongue. The writer is someone who plays with his mother's body (I refer to Pleynet on Lautréamont and Matisse): in order to glorify it, to embellish it, or in order to dismember it, to take it to the limit of what can be known about the body: I would go so far as to take bliss in a disfiguration of the language, and opinion will strenuously object, since it opposes "disfiguring nature."
> (Barthes 37)

In Barthes' search for his "unknown space," bliss (jouissance), he defines the writer as male, and the ground to be searched as "his mother's body." What is disconcerting about this passage is the objectification that the "mother" undergoes. She is there to be manipulated in whatever manner the (male) writer wishes; everything is permitted in his search for bliss.

Gynesis is, as yet, a largely unexplored phenomenon because, as Jardine says, it is usually transparent to a reader without any background in feminism (Gynesis 25). What I think its presence in a text indicates is a will to develop new paradigms for thinking about the world, but an inability to manage it entirely, because of a reluctance to re-think the deeply-ingrained stereotypical images of what "woman" signifies in Western society. Even when in a relatively positive mood, cyberpunk writers tend to see this question as irrelevant in relation to the "larger issues" that they purport to deal with; when I pressed Gibson on the possible relevance of gynesis to his work, Tom Maddox, who was

also present (and seems to have taken upon himself the role of Gibson's apologist), dismissed the question, categorizing it as one of a number of "creaky old novelistic categories that don't apply worth a fuck" (Wershler-Henry, "Queen" 32).

However, I think that it is worthwhile to examine closely anything that claims to be revolutionary, not only to look for what is new, but also to see what is being excluded. The power of cyberpunk lies in its drive to transgress, to cross any boundaries and violate any taboos it comes across. As Dr. Dashwood says in Robert Anton Wilson's Schrödinger's Cat Trilogy (a major influence on cyberpunk[8]), "without heretics and blasphemers--without rebels, that is--we would all still be living like Homo Erectus half a million years ago. All progress has been made by individuals who dared to think about the unthinkable and do the forbidden" (516). However, cyberpunk, a white, male, upper-middle class phenomenon--there are few, if any, female cyberpunk writers[9]--refuses to think the unthinkable about itself. The "snickering nihilism, hardcore sexual excess and harebrained violence" that are lauded as the most refreshing aspects of cyberpunk in the introduction to Semiotext(e) SF (13) are really nothing new; they have always been a part of male writing in the canon of Western literature. I suppose my question is that, if cyberpunk really does offer some genuinely new possibilities for ways of thinking about the world, why should these old, destructive elements be amplified further?

Some idea of the direction cyberpunk will take if the nihilism and violence gain primacy can be acquired by reading K. W. Jeter's Dr. Adder. This book, written in 1972 and not published until 1979, predates the cyberpunk movement by a considerable number of years, but is only now gaining widespread popularity. The book's premise is an extrapolation made from a letter to

Penthouse magazine expressing a desire to see pictorials of female amputees (an excerpt of this letter forms the epigram for the book). Dr. Adder is a surgeon who mutilates the bodies of prostitutes (with their consent, of course) in order to increase their street value--he literally inscribes desire onto their bodies.

The idea that women really want to suffer in sex is the traditional defense of perpetrators of sexual violence against women. It is also the rationale of Adder and his apologists. Central to Adder's practice is a drug called ADR, that reveals to him the deepest secrets of his patients' subconscious:

> "For one price, sometimes taken as a percentage of future earnings, he'll run a young girl, fresh on the Interface, under the ADR, and then surgically bring about the particular masochistic fantasy he saw there. It's kind of moral, actually. An aptitude test for determining what degradation would be most satisfying; what they were looking for in L.A. to begin with, or else they wouldn't be here, only it was too far buried for them to be sure of discovering themselves [sic]."
> (Jeter, Dr. 78)

But "she wanted it" isn't the whole story, or even most of it. What the women want is completely irrelevant in the long run; Adder's whole enterprise is really about generating revenue. The inscription of the desire of the prostitutes' clients on the prostitutes' bodies (i.e. converting them to a valuable commodity for exchange) is where the money really is. To quote Luce Irigaray:

> For woman is traditionally use-value for man, exchange-value among men. Merchandise, then. This makes her the guardian of matter whose price will be determined by "subjects": workers, tradesmen, consumers, according to the standard of their work and their need-desire. Women are marked phallically by their fathers, husbands, procurers. This stamp(ing) determines their value in sexual commerce.
> (105)

The only reason that Adder ever runs the drug on a woman, it seems, is to provide some kind of variety for those men who can't afford better.

> "For a higher price," said Droit, "Adder runs the ADR on those who can afford to pay for it, mostly big schticks in the GPC and high army brass. That's to find out what private, basic lusts are in them, aching to be released and satisfied. Whereas most poor schmucks from Orange County you see on the Interface have to find their own private kinkhood through experimentation. In both classes, nearly all the fantasies deal with the amputation or mutilating or altering of the sexual object. Hence, all of the chopped hookers out on the street. The rich customers get one cut to the exact specifications of their ADR-revealed hunger--there's never any problem finding girls for it--and store them in little rooms in the buildings along the street. They swap door keys every now and then for variety, but for the most part they're fantastically attached to their little pets. After all, deep below, that's what they've been lusting after for millions of years."
> (Jeter, Dr. 78-79)

Against impossible odds, Adder, with the help of Mox's son (on a quest to find his "dead father"), overcomes his foe, the hyperPuritan John Mox (the pun is obvious), who has abandoned his body to live inside a machine. The novel ends with the triumphant Adder about to fulfil what has been his motivating drive all his life: to tell the world to go fuck themselves. I think Philip K. Dick misses the point somewhat in his attempt to defend the novel's value in its afterword, where he says, "Did the movie Jaws advocate biting children in half?" (235). The issue is not whether or not Dr. Adder is a "dirty" or amoral book, or whether Jeter's vision is ironic (which it most assuredly is), but whether it has actually managed to do anything really different from the great bulk of men's writing.

I think that there is also another, genuinely progressive tendency in cyberpunk, especially in Gibson's work: an authentic presentation and exploration of new ideas and new spaces. Most of Gibson's female protagonists display an incredible resistance to the attempts of various (male) power structures to overwrite them and objectify them into commodities. And there is

the larger issue of gynesis to deal with as well: is the space of the imaginary in Gibson's texts--cyberspace--gendered feminine? And, if so, what are the implications? I hope that this thesis will prove to be a positive step in the exploration of these ideas.

Regarding my decision to interpret Gibson's work in a manner that is primarily feminist: I could probably produce another entire thesis based on whether or not I have the right to use a feminist discourse, or whether it is even possible (entire books have been written on the subject[10]). My intent is to use my awareness of feminist theory to help "re-radicalize post-structuralism" (Jardine & Smith, Men 253) by examining what really is radical --and what isn't--in texts like Gibson's, which are in the process of massive institutionalization as the Latest Thing. I hope that this project isn't construed as an appropriation of feminist theory, or as an invasion of its field of study, but rather as my attempt to deal with issues in science fiction and popular culture by borrowing some of the tools that a study of feminist theory has made available to me. Hopefully, this thesis will be accepted by the women who read it as interest on that loan.

I will begin my study of Gibson's work by using two short stories from Burning Chrome, "Burning Chrome" and "Johnny Mnemonic," to introduce the basic concepts I will be examining in the longer works:

1. Gynesis: The female body as map for Postmodern Man through an unknown "other space," (i.e. cyberspace) a space that is gendered feminine--cyberspace as "the matrix" (matrix: womb, a female space).
2. Body Inscriptions: The manner in which the bodies of women (and sometimes men) are inscribed by this space itself, or by its creators, to act as maps for the men who explore it (woman as medium/seer and as

medium/writing medium, i.e. a tablet for writing on) And the way some characters attempt to counteract these actions by inscribing their own bodies.

3. The importance of language in the generation of these effects. As Samuel R. Delany says, this aspect of SF texts has been ignored for too long:

> [A]ny serious discussion of speculative fiction must first get away from the distracting concept of s-f content and examine precisely what sort of word-beast sits before us. We must explore both the level of subjunctivity at which speculative fiction takes place and the particular intensity and range of images this level affords.
> (36)

Words are slippery things; they have more meanings than we expect or acknowledge, and they resonate in even stranger ways when used in an SF context, producing unexpected effects. To use the example from #1 above, what are the implications that arise from dubbing cyberspace "the matrix" (i.e. a womb space)? It makes possible a reading of cyberspace as a feminine gendered space; and the entry into cyberspace by a male "cowboy" as an orgasmic experience. Whether or not these resonances are intentional, they are definitely there, and worth investigating.

The body of the thesis will consist of three chapters, one on each of Gibson's novels, Neuromancer, Count Zero, and Mona Lisa Overdrive (the loosely-connected "Sprawl Trilogy"), dealing with gynesis and body writing, and the way these issues arise out of Gibson's use of language.

* * * * *

"Burning Chrome": Sigils on the Map of A Hustler's Life

The short story "Burning Chrome" (from the book of the same name) serves as

a kind of primer for those new to Gibson's fictional world, as it outlines the basic concepts used in his long fiction to date. It is also the most uncomplicated example of gynesis in Gibson's texts, and consequently the best place for me to begin the presentation of my arguments.

The central characters are two professional data thieves, Automatic Jack (the narrator), and his partner Bobby Quine[11]. Bobby is of more interest right now, because he is a prototype for the main male characters of Neuromancer and Count Zero (Henry Dorsett Case and Bobby Newmark, respectively):

> Bobby was a cowboy. Bobby was a cracksman, a burglar, casing mankind's extended electronic nervous system, rustling data and credit in the crowded matrix, monochrome nonspace where the only stars are dense concentrations of information, and high above it all burn corporate galaxies and the cold spiral arms of military systems.
> (Gibson, BC 170)

Cyberspace, also known as the matrix, is a concept that Gibson seems to have borrowed to a large extent from William S. Burroughs. The following passage, from Michael White's review of Burroughs' The Western Lands, illustrates how the process of gynesis is at work in Burroughs' text (a man seeking a new imaginary, envisioned as some kind of "space"), and, by extension, how that feeds into Gibson's work:

> Burroughs is looking for an escape route; he wants a way out of the body and its built-in death mechanism . . . . Burroughs is working to map the terrain of the land of the dead; once it has been mapped then the escape routes can be determined. For many years now Burroughs has been telling audiences that he is more interested in space than in time and that the future lies in space. He claims that the next step in human evolution is into space. In The Western Lands he says, "our policy is SPACE... space programs, space exploration, simulation of space conditions, exploration of inner space, expanding awareness." (p.25) He has gone to great lengths in lectures and in his writing to define what he means by space. His conception is radically different from conventional understanding of space. . . .
>
> [A]nd now Burroughs forecasts a new possibility for the next step of human evolution. Burroughs presents a model based

> on the dream body. The dream body is a non-material vehicle of consciousness and is able to move through space in ways that the physical body cannot.
> (70-71)

Cyberspace is clearly analogous to Burroughs' concept of space, and the cowboys of Gibson's fiction do seem to take on "dream bodies" as they move through it. Gibson even seems to be picking up on the idea of cyberspace as "the land of the dead" in Neuromancer when the eponymous AI tells Case, "I am the dead, and their land" (Gibson, Nm 244), and in the later books, when the loa (remnants of the fused Neuromancer-Wintermute) take up residence in cyberspace.

It is worth noting that, as in the Old West of popular imagination, the cowboys in Gibson's texts are almost exclusively male (the sole exception being Jaylene Slide, a minor character in Count Zero), because their domain is the same one that men have always claimed: the cerebral and non-physical. Gibson's cowboys are the inheritors of the Burroughs vision. Hélène Cixous diagrams this relationship in "Sorties: Out and Out; Attacks/Ways Out/Forays" in The Newly Born Woman:

> Where is she?
> Activity/passivity
> Sun/Moon
> Culture/Nature
> Day/Night
>
> Father/Mother
> Head/Heart
> Intelligible/Palpable
> Logos/Pathos.
> Form, convex, step, advance, semen, progress.
> Matter, concave, ground--where steps are taken, holding-and-dumping-ground.
> Man
> Woman
> Always the same metaphor. . . .
> (64)

Cixous is pointing out that Man achieves his subjectivity at the expense of woman; his activity is grounded on the condition of her passivity. This binary system seems to hold true for the most part in Gibson's fiction. The male characters are the privileged, cerebral manipulators and explorers of cyberspace, the realm of knowledge, while the female characters seem to be more concerned with physical matters.

Gibson articulates this male contempt for the flesh fully in the opening pages of Neuromancer, when describing the inability of another cowboy--Case, the novel's central character--to enter the matrix:

> For Case, who'd lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars he'd frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh.
> (Gibson, Nm 6)

This is another reason why Bobby Quine (and Case after him) is the hero, a member of the elite; Jack, who "runs down all the little things that can give you an edge" (Gibson, BC 170) is relegated to the status of the cowboy's sidekick, dealing as he does with the "baser" physical needs.

Bobby and Jack are typical small-time hustlers, waiting for their Big Break. The introduction of a woman named Rikki signals the arrival of both the Big Break, and of the presence of gynesis in the text. "Bobby had this thing for girls, like they were his private tarot or something, the way he'd get himself moving" (Gibson, BC 171). This statement is reiterated and expanded several more times in the course of the narrative: "Bobby read his future in women; his girls were omens, changes in the weather, and he'd sit all night in the Gentleman Loser, waiting for the season to lay a new face down in front of him like a card" (Gibson, BC 173); "He turned them into emblems, sigils on the map

of his hustler's life, navigation beacons he could follow through a sea of bars and neon" (Gibson, BC 176). Following what gynesis predicts, Bobby reads Rikki as a sign of coming success in his forays into cyberspace. The problem with this is that it turns her into an object, a signpost; it denies her own subjectivity.

Bobby himself seems completely unaware of the callous manner in which he objectifies, utilizes and discards women; he claims to be motivated by love. "'I'm doing it for her,' he said as the door closed behind me. 'You know I am.'" (Gibson, BC 182). In this respect, he is similar to any other male Romantic artist who has claimed love for a woman as his source of inspiration:

> I didn't like having to listen to him tell me how much he loved her, and knowing he believed it only made it worse. He was a past master at the hard fall and the rapid recovery, and I'd seen it happen a dozen times before. He might as well have had NEXT printed across his sunglasses in green Day-Glo capitals, ready to flash out at the first interesting face that flowed past the tables in the Gentleman Loser.
> (Gibson, BC 176)

Bobby even renames Rikki according to the way he wishes her to be: "Rikki Wildside, Bobby called her" (Gibson, BC 175), as Swift renamed Stella, as Catullus renamed Lesbia, and so on. The high turnover rate for sources of inspiration--i.e. women--seems to be about equal in both cases as well[12].

Automatic Jack is a more sympathetic character than Bobby, because he acknowledges Rikki's personhood, her subjectivity. "I felt like screaming it at him--she was right there, alive, totally real, human, hungry, resilient, bored, beautiful, excited, all the things she was...." (Gibson, BC 176-77). The reason he doesn't ever confront Bobby is because he is to some extent complicit with Bobby's actions, and his own feelings of guilt add to the problem. Jack's guilt is rooted in his one visit to the House of Blue Lights, a brothel where the

prostitutes perform according to a neuroelectronic program, "in an approximation of REM sleep, while [their bodies] and a bundle of conditioned reflexes took care of business" (Gibson, BC 191). He too has utilized women's bodies as a tool in his attempt to find what was absent from his life.

This secret complicates Jack's relationships with all of the characters in the story, not just with Bobby. It is part of his rationale for "burning" Chrome (i.e. destroying the software in her computers, and rerouting the money from her accounts to their own), because she owns the House of Blue Lights. "I tried telling myself that it was a good idea to burn the House of Blue Lights because the place was a creep joint, but I just couldn't buy it" (Gibson, BC 185). However despicable Chrome may be, Jack is still aware that he is partly responsible for ending her life: "I thought about Chrome, too. That we'd killed her, murdered her, as surely as if we'd slit her throat" (Gibson, BC 189). Bobby, lost in the intellectual abstractions of cyberspace, shows no sign of acknowledging what the results of their actions will be:

> At the heart of darkness, the still center, the glitch systems shred the dark with whirlwinds of light, translucent razors spinning away from us; we hang in the center of a silent slow-motion explosion, ice fragments falling away forever, and Bobby's voice comes in across light-years of electronic void illusion--
>
> "Burn the bitch down. I can't hold the thing back--" (Gibson, BC 187)

The actions of the men in "Burning Chrome" fit quite easily into the patterns of gynesis--Postmodern Man reading his fortune on faces of woman-as-tarot-card, navigating the sea of cyberspace by the light of woman-as-navigation-beacon. But what about the behavior of Rikki? How well does she fit into the pattern? What Rikki wants most is a pair of Zeiss Ikon artificial eyes, so that she can become a simstim[13] star. She reads the map of Jack's body[14] (and presumably Bobby's as

well) through the sexual act, in an attempt to locate a route to the achieving of her own desire. It is on Jack's body that she finds the sign she is looking for:

> [S]he touched me, touched my shoulder, the half-inch border of taut pink scar that the arm doesn't cover. Anybody else ever touched me there, they went on to the shoulder, the neck....
>
> But she didn't do that. Her nails were lacquered black, not pointed, but tapered oblongs, the lacquer only a shade darker than the carbon-fiber laminate that sheathes my arm. And her hand went down the arm, black nails tracing a weld in the laminate, down to the black anodized elbow joint, out to the wrist, her hand soft-knuckled as a child's, fingers spreading to lock over mine, her palm against the perforated Duralumin.
> (Gibson, BC 177)

It is not inappropriate to read her erotic/fetishistic attraction to Jack's myoelectric arm as a sign that he will be able to fulfill her own desire for artificial augmentation[15].

Rikki's desire for Zeiss Ikon eyes seems to me to be rooted in a phenomenon that is closely related to gynesis--perhaps as its opposite--namely, the inscribing that individuals do on their own bodies. Dick Hebidge points out in Hiding in the Light that in situations where the individual has little or no power, and the body is literally all that she owns, body modifications can be the only remaining way of signalling difference.

> The swear word made flesh: "youth culture" as a sign-system centers on the body--on appearance, posture, dress. If teenagers possess little else, they at least own their own bodies. If power can be exercised nowhere else, at least it can be exercised here. The body can be decorated, and enhanced like a cherished object. It can be cut up and cooked like a piece of meat. Self mutilation is just the darker side of narcissism. The body becomes the base-line, the place where the buck stops. To wear a mohican or have your face tattooed, is to burn most of your bridges.
> (31-32)

In a science fiction world, body modifications can become a last resort for

becoming a subject (an autonomous human being) rather than an object (a cog in the wheel, a sarariman). Unfortunately, such rewriting is not always that successful. In Gibson's fictional world, and the new SF in general, owning one's body is not always a given either, but I will be talking more about that issue when I discuss Angela Mitchell in chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

The most troubling aspect of Rikki's attempt to assert her subjectivity is related to her ambition to become a simstim star. The simstim star, supposedly a kind of glamorous ideal subject, is actually an object, a money-making tool for network executives, really no better off than the antiquated movie cameras she replaces. Worse, in some ways, because a camera doesn't feel pain when it photographs something unpleasant. Consider the following excerpt from Mona Lisa Overdrive, where a technician is testing the responses of the nervous system of Angela Mitchell, a simstim star:

> "I'm ready now," Piper Hill said, eyes closed, seated on the carpet in a loose approximation of the lotus position. "Touch the spread with your left hand." Eight slender leads trailed from the sockets behind Piper's ears to the instrument that lay across her tanned thighs.
>
> Angie, wrapped in a white terry robe, faced the blonde technician from the edge of the bed, the black test unit covering her forehead like a raised blindfold. She did as she was told, running the tips of her fingers lightly across the raw silk and unbleached linen of the rumpled bedspread.
>
> "Good," Piper said, more to herself than Angie, touching something on the board. "Again." Angie felt the weave thicken beneath her fingertips.
>
> "Again." Another adjustment.
>
> She could distinguish individual fibers now, know silk from linen....
>
> "Again."
>
> Her nerves screamed as her flayed fingertips grated against steel wool, ground glass....
>
> "Optimal," Piper said, opening blue eyes.
>
> (Gibson, MLO 80-81)

Rikki has no idea of the fate that awaits her (if she succeeds at all in her quest), but the reader gets some idea of the utter disposability of simstim

personalities in the last paragraph of "Burning Chrome:" "Sometimes late at night I'll pass a window with posters of simstim stars, all those beautiful, identical eyes staring back at me out of faces that are nearly as identical, and sometimes the eyes are hers, but none of the faces are, none of them ever are" (Gibson, BC 191). The eyes, the artificial eyes, are all that is important; ironically, Jack sometimes thinks he can tell hers apart from any of the others. If the eyes are the windows to the soul, what happens to the soul of a person with artifical eyes?

The eponymous Chrome is also important in a discussion of gynesis in this story. It is her "space"--or rather, the n-dimensional representation of the data stored in her computers--that forms the unknown and deadly territory Bobby and Jack are navigating. It is as difficult to enter as the citadel of any sorceress from any fairytale, a "castle of ice" that contains a labyrinth: "leagues of corridor, mazes of shadow" (Gibson, BC 173). Bobby the cowboy is the postmodern Theseus, penetrating an archetypal female space, the labyrinth. "Labyrinth" from labrum: outer lip, vaginal lips; a representation of the (convoluted, interior, dark, dangerous) space women have always been assigned: "we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bevies" (Cixous, "Laugh" 248). Perhaps all cyberspace, not just Chrome's corner of it, is gendered feminine; according to gynesis (male explorer reading female body as map for female unknown space), it should be. The term "matrix" is synonymous with "cyberspace" in Gibson's work; the OED defines "matrix" as "1. The uterus or womb" (238). In Xerox and Infinity, Jean Baudrillard describes the process of man interfacing with his computer as a situation where jouissance is derived by interfacing with the Other, and becoming "virtually the Same" as it; gynesis by an-other name...

> [T]he "Telematic Man"[16] gives himself the spectacle of his fantasies and of a virtual "jouissance"[17] as he sits in front of his "minitel rose"[18]. He exercises "jouissance" or intelligence in the interface with the machine. The Other, the sexual or cognitive interlocuter, is never really aimed at--crossing the screen evokes the crossing of the mirror. The screen itself is targeted as the point of interface. The machine (the interactive screen) transforms the process of communication, the relation from one to the other, into a process of commutation, ie. the process of reversability from the same to the same. The secret of the interface is that the Other is within it virtually the Same--otherness being surreptitiously confiscated by the machine.
> (7-8)

The very language with which "Burning Chrome" (and Gibson's subsequent fictions) are written, then, suggests that cyberspace is a feminine space.

The manner in which the run into Chrome's computers is described furthers the thesis of male explorer/female-gendered explored space, as it takes on a decidedly aggressive sexual tone when Bobby and Jack's "central logic thrust" (Gibson, BC 175) breaches the gates (Gibson, BC 173) of Chrome's defenses. The final moment, when the Russian virus program burns down Chrome's cores, is couched in the terms of a male orgasm of mythical proportions:

> The Russian program, rising through towers of data, blotting out the playroom colors. And I plug Bobby's homemade command package into the center of Chrome's cold heart. The squirt transmission cuts in, a pulse of condensed information that shoots straight up, past the thickening tower of darkness, the Russian program, while Bobby struggles to control that crucial second. An unformed arm of shadow twitches from the towering dark, too late.
>
> We've done it.
>
> The matrix folds itself around me like an origami trick.
>
> And the loft smells of sweat and burning circuitry.
>
> I thought I heard Chrome scream, a raw metal sound, but I couldn't have.
>
> (Gibson, BC 187-88)

The run now looks more than a little like a rape, with Chrome, its victim, being fucked to death. No wonder Jack feels uncomfortable after the deed is done. No wonder many feminists are uncertain and distrustful of what the presence of

gynesis actually indicates (Jardine, Gynesis 25).

* * * * *

"Johnny Mnemonic": Scars and Tattoos and Teeth

My discussion of "Johnny Mnemonic" will focus on two topics: body inscription, and marginal space. Both of these topics figure strongly in my analysis of Gibson's longer work, because they are closely related to the gynesis process.

The first of these topics, body inscriptions, is central to "Johnny Mnemonic," because one of the chief concerns of the story is the manner in which power structures inscribe themselves on people. Johnny, a self-described "very technical boy" (Gibson, BC 1) is similar to Rikki in "Burning Chrome" in that he has had himself surgically modified in a manner that he hoped would increase his own personal power. Computer chips implanted in his amygdalae turn him into a walking storage system for illicit data, data that he himself cannot access:

> "The stored data are fed in through a modified series of microsurgical contraautism prostheses." I reeled off a numb version of my standard sales pitch. "Client's code is stored in a special chip; barring Squids, which we in the trade don't like to talk about, there's no way to recover your phrase. Can't drug it out, cut it out, torture it. I don't know it, never did."
> (Gibson, BC 9)

As in Rikki's case, this modification has actually led to Johnny's being disempowered, objectified, used:

> And it came to me that I had no idea at all of what was really happening, or of what was supposed to happen. And that was the nature of my game, because I'd spent most of my life as a blind receptacle to be filled with other people's knowledge and then drained, spouting synthetic languages I'd never understand. A very technical boy. Sure.
> (Gibson, BC 18)

Johnny, however, is less of a victim than Jones the dolphin: a cyborg and a junkie (hence the punning name). Johnny meets him in a second-rate kiddie funland, long after his usefulness as a SQUID[19] has ended.

> He was more than a dolphin, but from another dolphin's point of view, he might have seemed like something less. . . . He rose out of the water, showing us the crusted plates along his sides, a kind of visual pun, his grace nearly lost under articulated armor, clumsy and prehistoric. Twin deformities on either side of his skull had been engineered to house sensor units. Silver lesions gleamed on exposed sections of his gray-white hide.
> (Gibson, BC 10)

All of these so-called "amplifications" are described in language that makes them appear as symptoms of a disease: "crusted plates," "deformities," "lesions." Yet Jones' body is inscribed by the impersonal power structure of the Navy in a more subtle and disabling manner than his visible modifications:

> "[H]ow does a cybernetic dolphin get wired to smack?"
> "The war," she said. "They all were. Navy did it. How else you get 'em working for you?"
> (Gibson, BC 12)

The action in the story centers around the events that occur when a fence named Ralfi Face plants some information stolen from the Yakuza (the multinational Japanese owned-and-operated crime syndicate) in Johnny's head, and the Yakuza comes looking for him (the seemingly hopeless struggle of one or two individuals against vast impersonal power structures is a consistent characteristic of Gibson's plots). The assassin sent after Johnny, like most of Gibson's villains, is like a worker-drone insect, or a soulless piece of machinery fresh off the assembly line--a reflection of the hive mentality of any multinational corporation. "His nervous system's jacked up. He's factory custom"; "mostly grown in a vat in Chiba City" (Gibson, BC 8)[20]. Ralfi Face and his henchman Lewis share this tendency toward homogeneity as well: "Built

something like an overripe pear, he'd worn the once-famous face of Christian White for twenty years. . . . But Ralfi's eyes lived behind that face, and they were small and cold and black"; "Lewis. . . looking like something built from a kit" (Gibson, BC 3).

This kind of homogeneity is what the Lo Teks ("Low Technique, low technology"--Gibson, BC 14) renounce. They do so by outwardly marking themselves as the opposite extreme of anonymous good looks:

> Lo Tek fashion ran to scars and tattoos. And teeth. (Gibson, BC 18)
>
> In the narrow beam of her taped flash, he regarded us with his one eye and slowly extruded a thick length of grayish tongue, licking huge canines. I wondered how they wrote off tooth-bud transplants from Dobermans as low technology. Immunosuppressives don't exactly grow on trees. . . .
>
> He might have been fifteen, but the fangs and a bright mosaic of scars combined with the gaping socket to present a mask of total bestiality. It had taken time and a certain creativity to assemble that face, and his posture told me he enjoyed living behind it. (Gibson, BC 14-15)

This is the punk ethic that is partly responsible for the cyberpunk (sub)genre's name: a deliberate, affected self-marginalization[21]. This last resort rebellion actually does seem to have the desired effect: "who notices a few dozen mad children lost in the rafters?" (Gibson, BC 14).

The only major character in the story who seems to be functioning in a completely autonomous manner, and is in full control of her own body and mind, is Molly Millions. It is no coincidence, then, that Molly appears more often than any of Gibson's other characters (she figures prominently in both Neuromancer and Mona Lisa Overdrive), and seems to fare much better than most of them. Molly is the only character in the whole Sprawl saga to have achieved some measure of real autonomy through having her body surgically modified.

> And I saw for the first time that the mirrored lenses were surgical inlays, the silver rising smoothly from her high

> cheekbones, sealing her eyes in their sockets. (Gibson, BC 6)
>
> "See, Molly's been to Chiba too." And she showed me her hands, fingers slightly spread. Her fingers were slender, tapered, very white against the polished burgundy nails. Ten blades snicked straight out from their recesses beneath her nails, each one a narrow, double-edged scalpel in pale blue steel. (Gibson, BC 8)
>
> [H]er T-shirt was sleeveless, faint telltales of Chiba City circuitry traces along her thin arms. (Gibson, BC 19)

Why is Molly successful where others fail? Unlike Johnny and Rikki, whose prostheses allow and encourage other people to access their bodies and minds, her modifications are specifically designed to preserve her physical and mental integrity: razor claws to repel, mirrors over eyes to reflect the invasive power of the gaze away from the windows to her soul. Molly is ruthless in the protection of her (hard-won) integrity--the only policy that is effective in a world as invasive as the one Gibson posits. I will be discussing Molly's body modifications at greater length in chapters 2 and 4 of this thesis.

The description of the spaces in which the events of the story unfolds is also relevant to a discussion of gynesis in Gibson's fiction. The majority of the story's action takes place in the most marginal, the most unknown of unknown spaces:

> Where do you hide from the Yakuza, so powerful that it owns comsats and at least three shuttles? . . . .
>
> Molly had an answer: you hide in the Pit, in the lowest circle, where any outside influence generates swift, concentric ripples of raw menace. You hide in Nighttown. Better yet, you hide <u>above</u> Nighttown, because the Pit's inverted, and the bottom of its bowl touches the sky, the sky that Nighttown never sees, sweating under its own firmament of acrylic resin, up where the Lo Teks crouch in the dark like gargoyles, black-market cigarettes dangling from their lips. (Gibson, BC 8-9)

Gibson's protagonists gain the extra advantage they need to overcome obstacles when they are operating in the spaces that are marginal to society. These are the spaces that Mircea Eliade describes as "chaos" in The Sacred and the Profane:

> One of the outstanding characteristics of traditional societies is the opposition that they assume between their inhabited territory and the unknown and indeterminate space that surrounds it. The former is the world (more precisely, our world), the cosmos; everything outside it is no longer a cosmos but a sort of "other world," a foreign, chaotic space, peopled by ghosts, demons, "foreigners" (who are assimilated to demons and the souls of the dead).
> (29)

The territory of the Lo Teks, as sub-rational, unrefined, dark and dangerous is directly opposite to things that are rational, refined, and enlightened ("male"). Molly serves as Johnny's guide through its dangers, and she is clearly at home there. At home enough to dispose of the Yakuza assassin in a savage, irrational dance of violence that seems to disrupt his perceptions of the possible to the point where he is unable to function: "She'd killed him with culture shock" (Gibson, BC 21).

In this instance, Molly as woman/other/marginalized has overturned the binary heirarchy that Cixous describes. I think this is what Cixous has in mind when she speaks of women seizing the marginal as a place from which to speak, using it as an "anti-logos weapon" ("Laugh" 250). This seems to be similar to a concept that first appears in Gibson's short story "New Rose Hotel": the Edge. "The Edge was Fox's grail, that essential fraction of human talent, non-transferable, locked in the skulls of the world's hottest research scientists" (Gibson, "New" 103). It's not surprising that Molly is obsessed with "keeping the edge on her game" (Gibson, Nm 177, 267). The Edge is unpredictable; it can allow the individual to triumph against all odds, for a while, at least[22].

* * * * *

I chose to use "Burning Chrome" and "Johnny Mnemonic" as an introduction to this thesis because they provide good examples of the manner in which the ideas of gynesis and body inscription apply to the bulk of Gibson's writing. As I expand on the picture provided by my brief examination of these two stories, I hope to draw some conclusions about what the presence of these elements signifies.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Until recently, I was laboring under the delusion that I was going to be the first to make the comparison between the most famous beat and the most famous cyberpunk, but upon rereading the twentieth anniversary issue of Rolling Stone, I found the following:

> A new movement is emerging. It's something like the beatniks of the Fifties or the hippies of the Sixties. It's called cyberpunk. The concept comes from William Gibson's book Neuromancer.
> (Timothy Leary, in Sheff 228)

2. I am indebted to Tom Maddox for this metaphor, which he uses in "William Gibson: A Bio" (ConText '89 Program, 10-11; also published as "Maddox on Gibson," Virus 23 0, 24-25).

3. Here are the citations for the major pieces that have appeared; there are also numerous smaller articles and allusions, especially in Spin.

Gibson, William. "Rocket Radio." Rolling Stone 554 (June 15, 1989).

Gilmore, Mikal. "The Rise of Cyberpunk." Rolling Stone 488 (December 4, 1986).

Greenfield, Adam. "New Romancer." Spin 4.9 (December 1988).

4. Keyboard 15.5, 157 (May 1989).

5. Although I feel the quality of the Krokers' work is often suspect, my point in this instance is that the influence of Gibson's work is noticeable even among those who choose to express themselves through academic modes of discourse.

6. This may sound surprising, but SF is as reactionary toward the presence of

outside influences as mainstream literature is toward the introduction of SF elements. As Lucy Sussex points out in her article "Falling Off the Fence: Reviewing William Gibson's Neuromancer and Count Zero," Gibson's forays away from the (still predominant) plain prose style of most SF novels has elicited both praise of his work as poetry, and accusations of sloppiness and pretentiousness (27-28).

7. While the invention of the cut-up is often credited to Burroughs, who popularized it, it was actually invented by his friend and collaborator, artist Brion Gysin. The intention behind the cut-up process is to rub out "the Word" (Logos?), and to find some other form of communication. "If the whole thing began with the Word, well then, if we don't like what was produced, and we don't, let's get to the root of the matter and radically alter it" (Gysin, in Wilson 41). Terry Wilson's "biography/appreciation" in Re/Search #4/5 points out that there is perhaps a genuine misogyny lurking behind what Jardine calls the "fear of association" that is the motivation for the cut-up process: "In [Gysin's novel] The Process the Word is Female, the instrument of female illusion which must be rubbed out" (42).

8. Wilson, with his usual deliberately affected pomposity, refers to it as "the first cyberpunk novel" (Wilson, "Cyber-Evolution" 42).

9. Women like Kathy Acker have influenced the work of various cyberpunk writers (see Richard Kadrey's "Cyberpunk 101 Reading List," Whole Earth Review 63 [Summer 1989], 83) and been influenced by it in turn. Acker's last novel, Empire of the Senseless, includes many references to, and in some cases, direct paraphrases of Neuromancer, particularly in the "Nightmare City" section (27-42). However,

Acker is writing on the other side of the fence; her work is published as what Gibson earlier referred to as "avant-garde mainstream literature."

10. Jardine, Alice, and Paul Smith, eds. Men in Feminism. New York: Methuen, 1987.

11. Bobby Quine is named after a real person: Bobby Quine, the guitar player for protopunk band Richard Hell and the Voidoids (it is touches like this that made the name "cyberpunk" stick). The following anecdote from Lester Bangs' Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung makes the reason for this homage obvious: "[Quine] is one of the few guitarists I know who can handle the supertechnology that is threatening to swallow players and instruments whole-"You gotta hear this new box I got," is how he'll usually preface his latest discovery, "it creates the most offensive noise..." (246).

12. Even a cursory examination of the torrid love lives of the Romantics or the Pre-Raphaelites would seem to indicate that they felt a need for "fresh inspiration" (i.e. a new mistress) on a greater than regular basis.

13. Simulated stimuli: a broadcast system in which the viewer perceives the world vicariously through the sensorium of a person wired to act as a kind of living camera.

14. Is gynesis a two-way street? Gibson seems to think so: "the thing that I would question in that theory, as you paraphrased it, is that women's bodies are the map; I think bodies are the map" (Wershler-Henry, "Queen" 31). Body inscriptions are a two-way street; women read men's bodies as well as the other way 'round. However, gynesis is a specific type of reading, where "woman" has

become our culture's dominant metaphor for the unknown. If "man" was becoming metaphorized in a similar manner, then there would be a case for the existence of an analogous process.

15. Jack's arm is an inscription made on his body by an impersonal power structure, the same one that created Jones the dolphin--war.

16. "Telematic: from the French 'Télé' and '[infor]matique' (computer sciences) for the whole set of techniques and services which combines the means of computer science with those of telecommunication" (Baudrillard, Xerox 7).

17. "Jouissance: intense pleasure that, in this context, one might attain when using computers" (Baudrillard, Xerox 7).

18. "Minitel rose: "minitel refers to the telephone system that has been established in France on a computer network, and made freely available to every home; 'rose' refers to the types of messages--sweet ones--that can be exchanged through the 'minitel'" (Baudrillard, Xerox 7).

19. "Superconducting quantum interference detectors. Used them in the war to find submarines, suss out enemy cyber systems" (Gibson, BC 9).

20. In point of fact, body modification among Yakuza is practiced regularly even today, albeit in a less dramatic fashion than Gibson envisions. Heather McDonald, a photographer and fashion designer who had close ties with the Yakuza for several years, has the following to say in an interview in Re/Search #12:

> They. . . often have beautiful tattoos all over their bodies. Supposedly that originated as a means of guarding against would-be inflitrators or informers. Generally parts of their fingers are missing, because over the years they chop them off, knuckle by knuckle, for various transgressions committed. They have to do this in front of their boss, and show no pain.

> Men who have been in the Yakuza often go to prison for various reasons. . . . And in prison they do these penile implants--take a pearl and insert it under the skin of their penis for every year they've been in jail.
> (Vale, "Heather" 156)

21. The logic behind body modification in Jack Womack's Ambient is similar (an Ambient is a mutant, either accidental or intentional):

> Enid--like me--was born full-formed in the city, but there were many among the city's disconcerted who saw in Ambients a chance to add their support to the statement already made; Enid saw early. By altering the body in unappealing ways and thus becoming voluntary, the non-Ambient might not only find kinship but could as well demonstrate the iniquity of a society that forced one to do such. I am not much for dogma, myself.
> (68)

22. Molly reveals in Neuromancer (176-78) that the Yakuza eventually do catch up with Johnny and kill him, even after his adoption of the Lo Tek look: "I don't look much like Eddie Bax these days. I let Molly take care of that, with a local anaesthetic. And my new teeth have almost grown in" (Gibson, BC 21).

Chapter 2

Neuromancer: The Meat and its Wants

> There are plenty of images of women in science fiction. There are hardly any women.
>
> -Joanna Russ

> "[T]hese guys are all batshit in here, like they got luminous messages scrawled across the inside of their foreheads or something."
>
> -Molly (Gibson, Nm 189)

In an essay titled "About 5,750 Words," Samuel R. Delany claims that "Virtually all the classics of speculative fiction are mystical" (34). Judging from the context in which Delany makes this statement (a discussion of Alfred Bester's The Stars My Destination[1]), what he means specifically by this rather broad claim is that the protagonist(s) of these "classic" texts undergo some sort of transcendent experience. I am going to use Delany's theorem as a sounding-board for my discussion of William Gibson's Neuromancer (and, eventually, Mona Lisa Overdrive), not only because the incorporation of Gibson's fiction into the SF canon seems to hinge on the question of its "mystical" qualities, but also because I have doubts about the validity of the transcendent moments in his books. Those doubts stem from observations I have made about the mechanics of those moments while reading Gibson's texts through the critical lens of Alice Jardine's theory of gynesis.

I suppose that there is almost always some kind of struggle when a new work is incorporated into an existing canon; the declaration of Neuromancer as a "classic" of SF by various critics has created considerable controversy among other critics and readers. Richard Slaughter's position in "Metafiction,

Transcendence and the Extended Present" typifies the negative responses toward the novel:

> If there have been any major American novels (other than those cited) dealing with true psycho/spiritual developments, I would like to hear about them. Gibson's award-winning Neuromancer seems to me to move in an entirely different direction toward surfaces, techno-nihilism and de-personalisation: concerns which, as Lewis Mumford long ago pointed out, were disastrous when they first appeared in pre-history. (61)

I am going to take issue with Slaughter's position because I think he is mistaken on two counts. First, Gibson's concern with surfaces establishes the selfhood of his characters; it does not contribute to their "depersonalisation." Australian feminist critic Elizabeth Grosz concludes, following Michel Foucault, that "If power is primarily ideological, that is, a system of conceptual distortion, if ideas, beliefs, ideologies, values--some kind of soul --is to be attributed to the human subject, this is an effect of a certain mode of corporeal inscription" ("Inscriptions" 2). That is, the existence of a subject's "interiority," or personality, is dependent on the inscriptions various power structures leave on that subject's exterior (surface). Consequently, in addition to examining the problem of transcendence, this chapter will begin a discussion of body inscriptions in Gibson's novels that will be expanded upon in the following chapters.

My second reason for taking issue with Slaughter's position is that there are not one, but two mystical instances in Neuromancer, experienced not only by Case, the protagonist, when he overcomes his mind/body schism, but also (and perhaps more importantly) by the two merging artificial intelligences (AIs), Neuromancer and Wintermute. Slaughter is mistaken in his belief that Gibson's exploration of surfaces leads the field in "an entirely different direction,"

because it is the exploration of these surfaces that leads Case and the AIs to their mystical experiences, through the process of gynesis. The perspective from which I am working leads me to suspect that Case's personal moment of epiphany has some highly problematic elements, but that does not mean that the moment is not there.

Case, in his voyage into Neuromancer's core ("the land of the dead"), is an Orphic figure. Alice Jardine, following Jean Lyotard, reads the myth of Orpheus as an allegory for the crisis in Western philosophical thought that has brought about the presence of gynesis in postmodern male writing. De-centered and uncertain of his old ways of knowing, Man feels he must seek out his "other" in an attempt to find some new strategies for dealing with his epistemological crisis. That "other," it seems, is consistently identified as "woman": "[T]he Philosopher-Man in the late twentieth century must descend, then find and embrace that <u>figure</u>, figurative device, which has no <u>visage</u>, no recognizable traits. And that figure, Eurydice, is <u>woman</u>" (Jardine, <u>Gynesis</u> 77). Jardine elaborates on this claim by postulating the origins of this pattern, and goes on to point out its usefulness for the male artist in crisis:

> [T]he genderization of the visage as male (hence to be rejected) and of the figure as female (hence to be embraced) is one of contemporary philosophy's own peculiar modes of gynesis. It is not a terribly original one. First of all, the indistinctness and distortion of the visage, the descent into the uncharted spaces of night, has everything to do with the infantile exploration of the <u>mother's face</u>--the first point of reference mapped by the infant in search of the breast. But second and most important, it has always been the woman's figure, her lack of visage, of individual traits, of identity and humanity, that has saved the male artist.
> (<u>Gynesis</u> 78)

When a male artist chooses to perpetuate this pattern in his art, it may solve his creative or philosophical dilemma, but it seems that it does so at the

expense of the subjectivity of the women he depicts.

As Jardine asserts, male artists and philosphers have been resorting to the strategies that produce gynesis for a long time. The Orpheus myth is a particular instance of a larger pattern, one that is central to Western literature. In The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Joseph Campbell calls it (after James Joyce) the "monomyth," and summarizes it as follows: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (30). The lack of inclusivity in Campbell's language is telling. The gender of his "archetypal" hero is obviously male, as are the people who benefit from the knowledge he gains from his encounter with "otherness." Could it be that the transcendent moment itself in Western literature is a phenomenon experienced almost exclusively by men, for the advancement of other men?

The negative and often bloody consequences of the male protagonist's transcendent moment for the female characters in fiction renders the value of that moment questionable. If there is nothing in a text to subvert or make amends for the damage done to other characters and the environment by the male protagonist on his quest, then I cannot help but feel that the text is not truly revolutionary, despite any postmodern bells and whistles the author may have included. It is my contention that Gibson's texts make some positive steps in this direction, but there are still many instances in his work that a reader with any feminist inclinations whatsoever may find problematic. In his review of Mona Lisa Overdrive, Andrew Stone concurs with this general sentiment:

> People may choose to argue with what we might infer to be Gibson's political positions, but the more important thing is that he has taken them at all. He offers more perceptions and observations than he does solutions, and some of what look

> like his answers may be a bit individualistic or nihilistic to be rated totally Politically Correct.
> (70)

The mystical experiences in Neuromancer (both Case's and that of the two AIs') involve the overcoming of dualism. Douglas Hofstadter, author of Gödel, Escher, Bach, explains that transcending dualism is an integral part of the mystical experience:

> Perhaps the most concise summary of enlightenment would be: transcending dualism. Now what is dualism? Dualism is the conceptual division of the world into categories. Is it possible to transcend this very natural tendency? . . . . [T]he breaking of the world into categories takes place far below the upper strata of thought; in fact, dualism is just as much a perceptual division of the world into categories as it is a conceptual division. In other words, human perception is by nature a dualistic phenomenon--which makes the quest for enlightenment an uphill struggle, to say the least.
> (251)

Hofstadter's definition is reasonably complete, but it does omit the feminist argument (as articulated by Hélène Cixous, cited in my Introduction) that dualism is an essentially patriarchal structure--hence "very natural," because it is all our civilization has ever known. The movement towards transcendence is not what is at fault, then; it is essentially positive, because it is a movement away from dualistic (patriarchal) paradigms of thought. Rather, the problem must lie in the manner in which men attempt to achieve transcendence, rather than in the instant itself. Gynesis, as Jardine says, is a process (Gynesis 25), and that process is the problem.

The main character of Neuromancer, a down-and-out cyberspace cowboy named Henry Dorsett Case, is suffering from acute dualism. At the opening of the text, the reader learns that Case recently doublecrossed one of his employers, who, in retaliation, damaged his nervous system in such a way that he is unable to "jack in"[2] to cyberspace. Consequently, Case is eking out a living by hustling

contraband biological substances on the Japanese black market. He spends a fair amount of his leisure time exploring various types of substance abuse, because, for a cyberspace cowboy, having to actually live in his own body is the worst of possible punishments. "For Case, who'd lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars he'd frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh" (Gibson, Nm 6)[3]. His brief exile from cyberspace does nothing to instil any respect for his body in him; if anything, it has the opposite effect. Even after his ability to access the matrix is restored, Case is still uncomfortable with his flesh: "His limbs felt cold and disconnected" (Gibson, Nm 68).

Case is in good company, because his contempt for the flesh is consistent with the entire Western intellectual tradition. Mind-body dualism is a major component of Western (male) philosophic thought, transmitted down the ages through the works of Plato, Paul, Augustine, Descartes, and many others. Its various forms all operate by creating a schism, declaring that mind and body are more or less separate entities[4]. What follows from this basic premise is that the body and all things physical are obviously inferior, secondary, and less desirable than the realm of the cerebral and/or spiritual. To refer to Cixous again, mind-body dualism also dictates that women are equated with the less desirable halves of any binary set, including the physical, bodily world, i.e. "the meat." "More so than men who are coaxed toward social success, toward sublimation, women are body" (Cixous, "Laugh" 257). Women aren't actually prohibited from entering the realm of mind (by becoming cowboys) in Gibson's fiction, but the power structure of the whole Western philosophic tradition is working against them[5].

Neuromancer opens with Case desperately seeking some way out of his bodily "prison," and back to his beloved cyberspace. Like Bobby in "Burning Chrome," he is looking for a sign, a map to lead him there. And, also as in "Burning Chrome," gynesis comes into play with the introduction of a female character: Linda Lee, Case's girlfriend. Gibson's description of her on her first appearance defines her body as Case's map, and her sexuality as a substitute for the pleasures of cyberspace[6]:

> Under bright ghosts burning through a blue haze of cigarette smoke, holograms of Wizard's Castle, Tank War Europa, the New York skyline.... And now he remembered her that way, her face bathed in restless laser light, features reduced to a code: her cheekbones flaring scarlet as Wizard's Castle burned, forehead drenched with azure when Munich fell to the Tank War, mouth touched with hot gold as a gliding cursor struck sparks from the wall of a skyscraper canyon. . . . [S]omehow she'd been singled out for him, one face out of the dozens who stood at the consoles, lost in the game she played.
> (Gibson, Nm 8)

The lights of the arcade games transform Linda's face into the embodiment of Case's nostalgic memories about cyberspace (cyberspace is nothing if not an extraordinarily sophisticated video game)[7]. Her body is transformed (objectified) by his need, into a map for his unknown spaces, his desires. "[H]er face [is] bathed in restless laser light, features reduced to a code [emphasis added]" for him to decipher. The repeated use of the image of the band of printed silk Linda Lee wears in her hair strengthens the argument that she acts as Case's map/substitute for cyberspace: "The pattern might have represented microcircuits, or a city map" (Gibson, Nm 9). When Case meets the "ghost" of Linda Lee in Neuromancer's beach construct, it is that scarf that provides both Case and the reader with her identity: "he recognized her headband, a rolled scarf, printed with a pattern like magnified circuitry" (Gibson, Nm 235)[8].

Case's obsessive need ultimately spells Linda's demise. He takes what he requires from her, offering nothing in return but his own self-destructive impulses. Gynesis seems to be, in part, a kind of vampirism, where the male protagonist infuses himself with life by draining the vitality from a woman, leaving her hollow, lifeless, and pliable in his hands. "It took a month for the gestalt of drugs and tension he moved through to turn those perpetually startled eyes into wells of reflexive need. He'd watched her personality fragment, calving like an iceberg, splinters drifting away, and finally he'd seen the raw need, the hungry armature of addiction" (Gibson, Nm 8). The utter indifference to Linda Lee's fate that the language of this passage indicates is chilling. When Linda Lee steals some valuable RAM from Case, presumably to support her various addictions, and is killed trying to fence it, the inconsequentiality of her life is confirmed: "Just cheaper for them to kill her and take it" (Gibson, Nm 39). The end of Linda Lee's life seems to be a necessary condition for her continued use-value as a map or series of signposts for Case; without her personality to interfere, her image can be put to any use, without complaint from its late owner.

After her death, the image of Linda Lee continues to haunt Case, goading him onward towards an unknown goal. She represents what he is unable to come to terms with--his body, the meat. While Case is on Freeside, Neuromancer[9] manipulates the artificial constellations of the space station's "sky" into Linda Lee's image:

> And then he was frozen, erect, fists tight against his thighs, head back, his lips curled, shaking. While he watched the loser's zodiac of Freeside, the nightclub constellations of the hologram sky, shift, sliding fluid down the axis of darkness, to swarm like live things at the dead center of reality. Until they had arranged themselves, individually and in their hundreds, to form a vast simple portrait, stippled the ultimate monochrome, stars against night sky. Face of Miss

Linda Lee.
(Gibson, Nm 155)

While her face is in one sense a "bad sign" (a reminder of his inadequacies), it also serves the traditional function of the constellations: it is an aid to navigation--gynesis in action. The sight of Linda Lee's face is a goad to Case, urging him onward, and fueling him with a hatred born of self-loathing.

The AI Neuromancer is behind these manipulations. It waves Linda Lee's image in front of Case like a carrot, reminding him of his inability to deal with his own fleshliness, which he constantly denies. Its hope was to eventually lure Case into itself, where it already had Linda Lee's "ghost," and to keep him there (Gibson, Nm 259). What Neuromancer did not realize was that Case could come to an appreciation of his own flesh through a reunion with Linda Lee, and find the strength to deny the ersatz reality of the beach construct and the rest of cyberspace. The two AIs are therefore responsible for both Case's mystical experience and their/Its own transcendent moment, as an effect of Case's (Wintermute directly so, because it actively uses Case as a device to achieve union, and Neuromancer indirectly, because its miscalculation allows Case's victory).

The geography of the construct in which Neuromancer places Linda Lee and Case takes the form of a beach with a continually receding horizon. "Said it was, was like... an event. An' it was our horizon. Event Horizon, he called it." (Gibson, Nm 243). The choice of words here is fortuitous, because the remarkable similarity of this passage to Alice Jardine's definition of a gynema creates an opportunity for comparison and reflection. According to Jardine, a gynema is the product of the process of gynesis, "neither a person nor a thing, but a horizon, that toward which the process is tending. . . . a reading effect, a woman-in-

effect that is never stable and has no identity" (Gynesis 25). The gynema of Gibson's text is the sentient Matrix that results from the merging of Neuromancer and Wintermute--"Cybernetic godhead" (Gibson, MLO 192). Like the gynema Jardine describes, Gibson's "cybernetic godhead" is ultimately unstable, shattering into the loa, the protean entities that populate cyberspace in his two other novels.

I have identified Neuromancer-Wintermute/the loa as the gynema of these texts because gynesis has everything to do with their creation. Case's own personal search, with Linda Lee serving as his beacon, leads up to that moment, and in the two subsequent books, the gynesis processes consist of characters who are trying to trace their way back to that moment of wholeness. The black hole metaphor ("event horizon") for the beach construct where these mystical experiences occur is an apt one; the Neuromancer-Wintermute joint mind (gynema) acts like the superdense singularity at the heart of a black hole, pulling all desire and narrative lines towards its core. It also evokes Luce Irigaray's summation of Freud's statements about the female genitalia: "her sexual organ represents the horror of nothing to see. A defect in this systematics of representation and desire. A 'hole' in its scoptophilic lens" (This 26). Gynesis: attraction to, and valorization of, that previously scorned blackness.

The AIs' transcendence process begins when Case has his own mystical experience: his mind/body schism is reconciled through making love to the "ghost" of Linda Lee. He comes to appreciate the complexity of the flesh as comparable to that of cyberspace (which, for him, makes it worthwhile). In this instant, the sexual act itself functions as a kind of map-reading, a tactile exploration of the elaborate topography of the body:

> There was a strength that ran in her, something he'd known in Night City and held there, been held by it, held for a while

> away from time and death, from the relentless Street that hunted them all. It was a place he'd known before; not everyone could take him there, and somehow he always managed to forget it. Something he'd found and lost so many times. It belonged, he knew--he remembered--as she pulled him down, to the meat, the flesh the cowboys mocked. It was a vast thing, beyond knowing, a sea of information coded in spiral and pheromone, infinite intricacy that only the body, in its strong blind way, could ever read. (Gibson, Nm 239)

This is the moment in his fiction that Gibson identified as being closest to an instance of gynesis.

> The closest I ever come to saying anything about that is the scene in Neuromancer where Case fucks Linda Lee in the construct on the beach. He has some kind of rather too self-consciously Lawrencian experience. He connects with the meat and it's like he gets Lawrencian blood-knowledge (and that's a little too much the English major there), but I was sincere about that; on some level I guess I believe it.
> (Wershler-Henry, "Queen" 30)

Sandra M. Gilbert, in "A Tarantella of Theory," her introduction to Hélène Cixous' and Catherine Clément's The Newly Born Woman, confirms the transcendent, anti-dualistic possibilities inherent to such a moment:

> Didn't D. H. Lawrence--in Lady Chatterley's Lover and elsewhere--begin to outline something oddly comparable to Cixous's creed of woman before she did? Describing the cosmic mystery of Connie's jouissance, this often misogynistic English novelist defines an "orgasm" whose implications, paradoxically enough, appear to anticipate the fusion of the erotic, the mystical, and the political that sometimes seems to characterize Cixous's thought on this subject, for Connie's coming to sexuality is also a coming to selfhood and coming away from the historically hegemonic Western "nerve-brain" consciousness that would subordinate body to mind, blood to brain, passion to reason. "She was like the sea," Lawrence enthuses about Connie's metamorphosis, "dark waves rising and heaving. . . the billows of her rolled away to some shore, uncovering her."
> (xvii)

However, there is a problem: it is only Case who reaches that moment of ecstasy; Linda Lee is (once again) totally irrelevant.

Linda Lee's reappearance, coinciding with the revealing of the gynema, should

be a warning to the feminist reader of impending difficulties:

> [The gynema's] appearance in a written text is perhaps noticed only by the feminist reader--either when it becomes insistently "feminine" or when women (as defined metaphysically, historically) seem magically to reappear within the discourse. This tear in the fabric produces in the (feminist) reader a state of uncertainty and sometimes of distrust--especially when the faltering narrative in which it is embedded has been articulated by a man from within a nonetheless still-existent discipline.
> (Jardine, Gynesis 25)

The problem with Gibson's vision of the beach scene is that there is no mention of any of what Linda Lee is feeling or thinking; it is all Case, attempting to find his way through her. This seems to be the real nature of gynesis: a false, one-way (male only) path to a transcendence that is therefore of dubious value.

It is something of a paradox that Linda Lee "pulls [Case] down" to her realm (the flesh), because while the simulacrum they both are inhabiting may or may not contain the "essence" of Linda Lee's self or soul, her actual body is long dead. Why does Case not come to his realization while making love to Molly, a much stronger, more confidently physical (and living) character? "A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can't possibly be a good fighter. She is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow" (Cixous, "Laugh" 250). Gibson compares the moment of Case's orgasm with Molly to entry into cyberspace (Neuromancer 33), yet this does not seem to be sufficient to spur Case's realization that he is rejecting his body for essentially unfounded reasons. What this seems to underline is the fact that Linda Lee does not function as an autonomous character, but as a tool, a mechanism that allows Case to achieve his private revelatory moment. The process of gynesis has turned her into an object: Case's map, a device for achieving an end. "[T]he woman-subject usually becomes a kind of 'filter' for questioning this space (a place of passage, a threshold

where 'nature' confronts 'culture'). But that is another problem; in fact, the mystification produced by imagining 'that there is someone in that filter' is the problem" (Jardine, Gynesis 89). The requirement that Linda Lee must play the role of Case's "filter" (and some woman must, within any fiction that uses gynesis to define its desired "other") precludes the possibility of her achieving any kind of autonomy or independence.

Immediately after the encounter with Linda Lee, Case begins to see traces of the "real" world through the simulacrum he is inhabiting somewhere in cyberspace: "His vision crawled with ghost hieroglyphs, translucent lines of symbols arranging themselves against the neutral backdrop of the bunker wall. He looked at the backs of his hands, saw faint neon molecules crawling beneath the skin, ordered by the unknowable code" (Gibson, Nm 241). The encounter with Linda Lee enables him to see the falsity of the illusionary space they are inhabiting, and to continue with his run. Maelcum's administering of an overdose to and placing of headphones on Case's physical body (Gibson, Nm 244-45) are co-incidental with Case's ability to see through Neuromancer's simulacrum, and may contribute somewhat to this ability, but they are not causative. Case sees through the illusion because he has successfully used Linda Lee and abandoned her. "You won when you walked away from her on the beach," Neuromancer tells Case. "She was my last line of defense" (Gibson, Nm 259).

I think that it is important at this point to examine exactly what is manipulating Case, and why, because such an examination reveals forces at work that act to counter the violence of Case's narrative. These forces, the artificial intelligences named Neuromancer and Wintermute, can be read as the voice of a suppressed woman re-asserting itself in the text in a manner that may have more revolutionary implications than Case's personal epiphany. The AIs

represent the possibility of a woman's vision for an "other" (non-dualistic, non-phallocentric) kind of intelligence. After merging, they/It may also have the power to bring about a genuine instance of the kind of transcendence that I believe only appears to take place for Bobby and Angie at the end of Mona Lisa Overdrive. Because the person who attains this transcendence is Linda Lee, there is at least an approximation of justice at work; perhaps in her cyberspace (after)life she will be less of a victim, less of an object (I will come back to this topic, but first I would like to lay some groundwork for that discussion by presenting my ideas about the significance of the two AIs).

There seems to be a theoretical analogue for the sentience of cyberspace in Jardine's theory of gynesis, grounded in her exploration of what happens when the thought structures that support the male/female binary pairs characteristic of Western thought are called into question ("Crises in Legitimation: Crossing the Great Voids"--Gynesis 65-87). Her argument centers around a sort of ur-binary pair: technē (male) and physis (female):

> Throughout the history of metaphysics, the only way to give a language to Nature, to Space, has been through the technē --through technique. The technē has been seen as the active, masculine aspect of "creation"; it either accomplishes what female, passive physis is incapable of doing, or else it imitates her.
> (73)

Man attempts to give his "other" (identified as feminine) space a language that he can use for his own purposes when all of his traditional narratives are called into question. However, there was an unexpected occurrence:

> At the end of the nineteenth century the possible relationships between technique and its spaces began to change radically, however, at the same time as the radical upheavals in familial, religious, and political structures seemed to accelerate. Suddenly, technique was engulfed by the very spaces that until that time had remained its passive sources, its objects. . . . space and matter were beginning to speak a language that Man did not want to hear. Although technique

> had always been an ambiguous instrument, one of both death and civilization, by the early twentieth century, its potentials for destruction as well as new forms of life began to overwhelm Man.
> (Jardine, Gynesis 74)

I think this description parallels the events in Gibson's text. The cowboys represent Man, exploring the spaces of the "other" during their forays into cyberspace. The sentience of that space is the unexpected backlash: a new form of life. Jardine's extrapolation of the legitimation crisis sounds eerily like the birth of the sentient Matrix from the Neuromancer/Wintermute binary pair:

> Could it be that the end of the history of technique... is the creation of an automaton, a kind of "spirit-in-matter"? Could this be the phantasmatic, utopian end point not only of all technical progress but of philosophy itself? A kind of sacred materiality that can communicate nothing detached from itself? A kind of "pregnant matter," as Derrida might put it? So closely associated with Western notions of God, this "spirit-in-matter" is terrifying, unnamable; it can engender itself; it has no need of a mother or father. It is beyond the representation that Man has always presented himself with and controlled. It is, in its essence, an indistinctness between the inside and the outside, between original boundaries and spaces. (Gynesis 76)

"Spirit-in-matter" is as good a term as any for what the AIs have become; in Gibson's later books, the primary metaphor used to describe them is of the loa, the spirit-gods of Haitian voodoo (Sol Yurick shows in Metatron that this is a perfectly logical paradigm: "Magic embodies a primitive theory of electromagnetism and telecommunication. . . . Voodoo, for instance, contains the notion of a communicating medium and the communicants who believe in it"--24).

Who is responsible for the creation of that "spirit-in-matter," the gynema that speaks back in a language Man does not want to hear? The answer to that question is Marie-France Tessier, the prophetic matriarch of the Tessier-Ashpool clan. She is one of the most important characters in the text, even though she

is long dead by the start of the narrative. Her daughter, 3Jane Tessier-Ashpool, explains to Molly that Marie-France's husband strangled her because he was unable to accept the radical otherness of the evolutionary path she had in mind for their family:

> She was quite a visionary. She imagined us in a symbiotic relationship with the AI's, our corporate decisions made for us. Our conscious decisions, I should say. Tessier-Ashpool would be immortal, a hive, each of us units of a larger entity. Fascinating. I'll play her tapes for you, nearly a thousand hours. But I've never understood her, really, and with her death, her direction was lost. All direction was lost, and we began to burrow into ourselves.
> (Gibson, Nm 229)

Marie-France programmed Neuromancer and Wintermute to behave in a manner that would not only bring about the major transcendent moment in Gibson's fictional world--the merging of the two AIs, and the resultant sentience of all of cyberspace--but would also subvert her husband's rigidly patriarchal vision for the future:

> Marie-France must have built something into Wintermute, the compulsion that had driven the thing to free itself, to unite with Neuromancer.
>
> Wintermute. Cold and silence, a cybernetic spider slowly spinning webs while Ashpool slept. Spinning his death, the fall of his version of Tessier-Ashpool. A ghost, whispering to a child who was 3Jane, twisting her out of the rigid alignments her rank required.
> (Gibson, Nm 269)

The AIs of Neuromancer (and their fragments, which become the loa of Count Zero and Mona Lisa Overdrive) can be read as representing the product of the female imaginary, the last remnants of an "other" vision for human evolution.

Wintermute presents Case with the image of a wasp's nest in a dream, in an attempt to provide a model of Marie-France's vision (Gibson, Nm 126). It both frightens and revolts Case, because he is unable to see the validity of what is essentially an alien paradigm of thought (the model of an AI conceived by a

woman, twice-removed from him as male). Case finally does come to recognize the integrity of Marie-France's vision, which is one of the few positive signs of change in him:

> He stared down into the Imperial Gardens, the star in his hand, remembering his flash of comprehension as the Kuang program had penetrated the ice beneath the towers, his single glimpse of the structure of information 3Jane's dead mother had evolved there. He'd understood then why Wintermute had chosen the nest to represent it, but he'd felt no revulsion. She'd seen through the sham immortality of cryogenics; unlike Ashpool and their other children--aside from 3Jane--she'd refused to stretch her time into a series of warm blinks strung along a chain of winter. (Gibson, Nm 268-69)

With that recognition, his goal becomes clear: to change something--anything--in an attempt to avoid the evolutionary dead-end that the senior Ashpool's vision of the future represents:

> "Give us the fucking code," he said. "If you don't, what'll change? What'll ever fucking change for you? You'll wind up like the old man. You'll tear it all down and start building again! You'll build the walls back, tighter and tighter.... I got no idea at all what'll happen if Wintermute wins, but it'll change something!"
> (Gibson, Nm 260)

The element of change is what makes the transcendent moment of the AIs more important than Case's personal mystical experience. He definitely does have some sort of epiphany, but nothing really significant changes as a result. He may now have an appreciation of the need to deal with his own corporeality, and some sympathy for a vision he still does not fully understand, but that is not transcendence (a movement to a higher state). It is just a reaffirmation of something that every human should know, cyberspace cowboys included.

While Case's story is very similar to that of most of the male heroes that have gone before him, the change that occurs as a result of his run on Neuromancer offers the possibility of a break from that narrative. The merged

AIs represent an overcoming of dualism: "Wintermute was hive mind, decision maker, effecting change in the world outside. Neuromancer was personality. Neuromancer was immortality" (Gibson, Nm 269). However, the possibilities that the merged AIs offer of an alternative to a non-dualist paradigm for intelligent thought remain merely possibilities. Without Marie-France's original vision to guide the development of the new cyber-god, It is directionless, and nothing really changes. "Things aren't different. Things are things," says Neuromancer-Wintermute to Case (Gibson, Nm 270). At the end of the book, It tells Case that It has made contact with an alien intelligence that is, apparently, a more scintillating conversationalist than any portion of humanity it has encountered (Gibson, Nm 270).

In Disappearing Through the Skylight, O. B. Hardison, Jr. quotes Edward Fredkin of MIT, who outlines the inevitability of AI disinterest in humanity:

> I suspect there will be very little communication between machines and humans, because unless the machines condescend to talk to us about something that interests us, we'll have no communication. For example, when we train a chimpanzee to use sign language so that he can speak, we discover that he's interested in talking about bananas. . . . But if you want to talk to him about global disarmament, the chimp isn't interested. . . . Well, we'll stand in the same relationship to a super artificial intelligence.
> (339-40)

This meshes with Hardison's thesis that the rapid advancement of technology leads to a physical disappearance (a topic I will address in the final chapter of this thesis). "If one of the divine attributes is knowledge surpassing human understanding, then Fredkin has imagined a godlike computer. More to the point, his computer has already all but disappeared. . . . The days when man and the gods walk the earth together in fellowship will evidently be few" (Hardison 341). It is impossible to say whether Marie-France's original plans could have

prevented the disappearance of her creation, and put It to a beneficial use; there is only the merest suggestion of that possibility in the text. Gynesis functions here by presenting a possibility for a genuine infusion of "woman" (the creation of a visionary woman) into the discourse of the text, only to have that possibility foiled. "Woman" (in this case, represented by Marie-France's AI creations) turns out first to be a marionette controlled by men for purposes alien to those of the woman who created it, and then a rapidly disappearing phantom. The birth of the AI cyber-god initially appears to be a more revolutionary event than it actually is.

Perhaps there are other grounds for valuing the transformation of Neuromancer-Wintermute above Case's own: humanitarian grounds (paradoxically enough, considering we are talking about a non-human intelligence). The new entity provides second chances of sorts for two of the less fortunate characters in the book, Linda Lee and the Dixie Flatline construct, by giving them an (after)life in cyberspace. Linda Lee's misfortunes have already been outlined in some detail, so perhaps a few words about the construct of McCoy Pauley ("the Dixie Flatline") are in order. Pauley the man is dead by the time of his construct's first appearance in Neuromancer. "It was disturbing to think of the Flatline as a construct, a hardwired ROM cassette replicating a dead man's skills, obsessions, knee-jerk responses...." (Gibson, Nm 76-77). Nevertheless, this construct is self-aware--alive by some definitions[10]--but unable to act autonomously (Gibson, Nm 79). Pauley's humanity, like Linda Lee's, is subjugated to the cause of Case's quest; both people are used by him as tools. What Neuromancer does for both of them is remove the restrictions of their predetermined lives, and give them a chance at another kind of "life".

Although the constraints on Pauley are more obvious (as a hardwired data

cartridge, he is physically incapable of change), Linda Lee's life was also predetermined. Neuromancer had anticipated her demise; it reveals to Case that there is in fact a map, a pattern to life that can be read the same way as marks on paper, computer screen or flesh: "I saw her death coming. In the patterns you sometimes imagined you could detect in the dance of the street. Those patterns are real. I am complex enough, in my narrow ways, to read those dances. . . . As clear to me as the shadow of a tumor to a surgeon studying a patient's scan" (Gibson, Nm 259). Her new "life" in cyberspace seems to be no worse than that. After successfully cracking the ice around Neuromancer's core, Case gains godlike knowledge of all the data within the AI's domain. When he sees Linda Lee in the construct of the beach, Neuromancer says to him, "But you do not know her thoughts. . . . I do not know her thoughts. You were wrong, Case. To live here is to live. There is no difference" (Gibson, Nm 258). It also tells Case, "McCoy Pauley has his wish [i.e. to be erased--Gibson, Nm 106; 206] . . . : His wish and more" (Gibson, Nm 260). Although it is never spelled out, it seems that what the AI does is give Pauley a cyberspace "body" modeled after Case's own, able to wander the matrix free of the constraints of hardware. The evidence to support this conclusion is drawn from one passage at the end of the text, where Case encounters three figures in cyberspace:

> And one October night, punching himself past the scarlet tiers of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority, he saw three figures, tiny, impossible, who stood at the very edge of one of the vast steps of data. Small as they were, he could make out the boy's grin, his pink gums, the glitter of the long gray eyes that had been Riviera's. Linda still wore his jacket; she waved, as he passed. But the third figure, close behind her, arm across her shoulders, was himself.
>
> Somewhere, very close, the laugh that wasn't laughter. (Gibson, Nm 270-71)

Two of the figures are obviously Linda Lee and Neuromancer-Wintermute, and I suspect that the last is the transformed Dixie Flatline. That laugh is identified with Pauley throughout the text: "When the construct laughed, it came through as something else, not laughter, but a stab of cold down Case's spine" (Gibson, Nm 106).

Some uncertainty remains in my mind about the validity of these "second chances." If life in cyberspace is "the same" as in the physical world, why does Case have to come to the realization that his body is as important as his mind? His mystical experience has to do with learning to be happy with the facts of his own existence as a flesh-and-blood creature, not with transcending that state. And, despite Its apotheosis, Neuromancer-Wintermute's sphere of influence is still limited to cyberspace. Perhaps, as Jean Baudrillard suggests in Xerox and Infinity, humanity will always possess certain intangible qualities that prevent machines from becoming our equals:

> [T]here is no prosthesis--technical or mediatized--for the pleasure of being human. To achieve this, machines would require an idea of man, but for them it is already too late: it is man who invented them. This is why man can exceed what he is, while machines will never exceed what they are. The most intelligent are no more than exactly as they are, except maybe in accidents or failures, to which we can always ascribe an obscure desire. They do not possess this additional touch of irony in their functioning, this excess of functioning which pleasure or suffering consist of, whereby men move away from their limits and move closer to their end. Unfortunately, machines will never exceed their own operation, which maybe explains the deep melancholy of computers... All machines are celibate.
> (5)

Baudrillard, however, wants it both ways; he goes on to create a loophole for himself by saying that the emergence of computer viruses may be a sign of machines attempting "to overcome their finality through their own devices . . . . Artificial intelligence may be parodying itself with this viral

pathology, thus unveiling some sort of genuine intelligence" (5-6). I think the answer is that "living" in cyberspace is not the same as living outside of it; Gibson expresses too much ambivalence toward the idea of abandoning the body both in his other books and in interviews[11]. Existence in cyberspace could only be so different that comparison is really impossible. Thus, the only consolation in Linda Lee's new "life" lies in the possibility that she may at least have something at the end of the text, even if it pales in comparison to the real thing.

One particularly good measure of the ambivalence toward the lures of transcendence that seems to be a factor in Gibson's writing is the presence of the only major character who appears in two of the sprawl novels: Molly. Molly (a.k.a. Molly Millions from "Johnny Mnemonic," and Sally Shears from Mona Lisa Overdrive) is Linda Lee's opposite in many respects. She represents a type of SF character that Sarah Lefanu calls a "science fiction Amazon":

> For many male writers of science fiction Amazons serve as symbol of all that is most feared and loathed as Other, the castrating mother wreaking vengeance for her condition on her male offspring. She must be denied through death, or forced into submission to a male-dominated heterosexual practice which then becomes the norm. As a general rule, as is well illustrated in the collection When Women Rule, Amazons must be punished, nominally perhaps for their presumption in assuming "male" characteristics, such as strength, agency, power, but essentially for their declaration of Otherness. (32)

That Molly escapes this kind of "punishment" (so common in other SF), is to Gibson's credit. According to Gibson, at least some women do see value in Molly as a character (to his surprise): "I didn't think women would go for the Molly character very much. I've really been surprised at the number of women who have come up to me and said, 'Molly's great. I really got off on her.' I think America is ready for a female lead who beats the shit out of everybody" (Leary

& Gibson 61). The violence inherent to the character is, of course, not what is really important, but rather that Molly is perhaps the most autonomous character in all of Gibson's fiction. She seems to be the only one who survives the cataclysmic changes that occur throughout the sprawl saga. The reason for this is that Molly is aware of what her body is worth, and does everything possible to protect its integrity.

Bruce Sterling, in his introduction to the Mirrorshades collection, points out that the invasive nature of technology is integral to the cyberpunk vision:

> Certain themes spring up repeatedly in cyberpunk. The theme of body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration. The even more powerful theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry--techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of the self.
> (xi)

Molly's two most recognizable characteristics--the mirrored lenses inset over her eyes, and the razor-sharp scalpel blades beneath her fingernails--seem to be adaptations she has made to protect her hard-won bodily integrity from outside intrusion. As she says, "It's my ass, boss, and it's all I got" (Gibson, Nm 184).

Eyes especially are very important in Gibson's fiction; their description tells much about the nature of the character. Linda Lee's eyes spell out her doom: "Eyes of some animal pinned in the headlights of an oncoming vehicle" (Gibson, Nm 8); Armitage's eyes are an indication of his total lack of personality, especially in Riviera's holographic caricature of him: "His eyes, Case saw, as Molly stepped forward, were tiny monitor screens, each one displaying the blue-gray image of a howling waste of snow, the stripped black trunks of evergreens bending in silent winds" (Gibson, Nm 209). Molly's mirrored eyes are of another order entirely.

First and foremost, they are Mirrorshades, icons of the cyberpunk movement. Bruce Sterling elaborates on this image:

> Mirrored sunglasses have been a Movement totem since the early days of '82. The reasons for this are not hard to grasp. By hiding the eyes, mirrorshades prevent the forces of normalcy from realizing that one is crazed and possibly dangerous. They are the symbol of the sun-staring visionary, the biker, the rocker, the policeman, and similar outlaws. Mirrorshades--preferably in chrome and matte black, the Movement's totem colors--appeared in story after story, as a kind of literary badge.
> (Mirrorshades ix)

The lenses mark Molly not only as an outsider, but also as a hero in a way Case clearly is not (Peter Riviera finds Case so physically unremarkable that he is unable to create a caricature of his image--Gibson, Nm 209). Moreover, the manner in which Gibson describes her locates her as the heir to an overwhelmingly male tradition. "For a few seconds, he knew, she was every bad-ass hero, Sony Mao in the old Shaw videos, Mickey Chiba, the whole lineage back to Lee and Eastwood" (Gibson, Nm 213). One of the reasons she creates such unease is that she is an interloper on male territory, and there is apparently no character in Gibson's fiction capable of unseating her[12].

Another function Molly's lenses serve is to act as a source of protection and a sign of her autonomy (especially in the face of male-dominated culture):

> [Terzibashjian] seemed to stare pointedly at Molly, but at last he removed the silver glasses. His eyes were a dark brown that matched the shade of his very short military-cut hair. He smiled. "It is better this way, yes? Else we make the tunel infinity, mirror into mirror.... You particularly," he said to her, "must take care. In Turkey there is disapproval of women who sport such modifications."
>
> Molly bit one of the pastries in half. "It's my show, Jack," she said, her mouth full.
> (Gibson, Nm 89)

Molly's mirrorshades are more than a sign of defiance; they are a way of preventing gynesis--of preventing men from reading what they want to see--in

her eyes. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément describe the manner in which eyes are a particularly vulnerable site on the woman's body, a site where the process of gynesis often begins:

> Is that me, a phantom doll, the cause of sufferings and wars, the pretext, "because of her beautiful eyes," for what men do, says Freud, for their divine illusions, their conquests, their havoc? Not for the sake of "me," of course. But for my "eyes," so that I will look at you, so that he will be looked at, so that he will see himself seen as he wants to be. Or as he fears he is not.
> (69)

To Terzibashjian, who comes from a culture where women were traditionally covered from head to toe save for their eyes, this would be a special affront. Even the act of crying, a sign of vulnerability, becomes offensive as a result of her implanted lenses:

> "But how would you cry, Molly, if someone made you cry?"
> "I spit," she said. "The ducts are routed back into my mouth."
> "Then you've already learned an important lesson, for one so young."
> (Gibson, Nm 183)

Her shielded eyes are only the most obvious of the many aspects of Molly's character that are totally enigmatic for readers as well as the other characters. Like Case, we never do learn the color of her eyes (Gibson, Nm 268), even when one of the lenses is smashed.

Molly's reshaping of her body and image--black leather, short bristly hair, facial alterations--marks her as the future's heir to the punk ethic. Her objectives for these alterations fit well with Dick Hebidge's description of punk girls in Hiding In the Light:

> [P]arodying the conventional iconography of fallen womanhood--the vamp, the tart, the slut, the waif, the sadistic maitresse, the victim-in-bondage.
> These girls interrupt the image flow. They play back images of women as icons, women as the Furies of classicial mythology. They make the s-m matrix [and the SF matrix]

> strange. They skirt round the voyeurism issue, flirt with masculine curiosity but refuse to submit to the masterful gaze. These girls turn being looked at into an aggressive act. (28-29)

Even Molly's manner of walking speaks of aggression: "Her body language was disorienting, her style foreign. She seemed continually on the verge of colliding with someone, but people melted out of her way, stepping sideways, made room" (Gibson, Nm 56).

The blades beneath her fingernails serve as the functional opposite of the mirrors over Molly's eyes: they give her the power to open up others, exposing them to her scrutiny. Gibson's explicit reference to them as "scalpel blades" (Neuromancer 25) makes Molly, their wielder, the surgeon, and invests her with the power of the surgeon's panoptical gaze[13]. In her hands lies the potential for a powerful (although admittedly pathological) reversal of the male-subject/female-object pornographic relationship. "If the obscene is a matter of representation and not of sex, it must explore the very interior of the body and the viscera. Who knows what profound pleasure is to be found in the visual dismemberment of mucous membranes and smooth muscles? Our pornography still retains a restricted definition" (Baudrillard, Seduction 32). What gives Molly's character integrity is the restraint with which she exercises this power. In Mona Lisa Overdrive, Gibson creates considerable tension by focusing on Molly's fingers at several key instants, but at no time in the entire text does she ever unsheath the blades. A code of ethics, a kind of bushido, is what places Molly above the level of a reprehensible Dr. Adder.

Molly's alteration of her body is a way of creating herself as a subject in a world where that seems to be quite difficult. Gibson's fiction is full of references to the homogeneity of the people who inhabit his projected future;

his villains especially are "tanned and forgettable," "nearly identical;" their faces examples of "the routine beauty of the cosmetic boutiques, a conservative amalgam of the past decade's leading media faces" (Gibson, Nm 21; 45). His heroes are people that manage to mark themselves as individuals separate from the faceless masses; in many cases, this is done through elective surgery. Molly, of course, is a perfect example. Elizabeth Grosz, in an unpublished paper entitled "Inscriptions and Body-Maps: Representation and the Corporeal," says the following: "The subject is named by being tagged or branded on its surface, creating a particular kind of 'depth-body' or interiority, a psychic layer the subject identifies as its (disembodied) core" (3). That is, by making alterations to her outer body, Molly literally creates her own soul--her interiority--and simultaneously provides for its protection. Molly's autonomy is based on more than visual difference, though. Her re-creation of herself defines her as a subject--someone with valuable skills to offer to others, rather than an object to be exchanged. "[T]he body can be reread as an agent, a contractual, exchanging being, a subject of the social contract" (Grosz 3). She is able to choose her employers, a rare luxury in Gibson's fictional world, dominated as it is by the zaibatsus, "multinational corporations that control entire economies" (Gibson, BC 103). Most people spend their entire lives functioning as one tiny cog within the structure of one zaibatsu or another. "[Case] wondered briefly what it would be like, working all your life for one zaibatsu. Company housing, company hymn, company funeral" (Gibson, Nm 37).

This kind of independence is hard-won in Gibson's world. Molly paid for it by compromising (for a time) what she wanted most: bodily integrity. She made the money for her surgery by acting as a kind of high-tech prostitute in the House of Blue Lights:

> "This cost a lot," she said, extending her right hand as though it held an invisible fruit. The five blades slid out, then retracted smoothly. "Costs to go to Chiba, costs to get the surgery, costs to have them jack your nervous system up so you'll have the reflexes to go with the gear.... You know how I got the money, when I was starting out? Here. Not here, but a place like it, in the Sprawl. Joke, to start with, 'cause once they plant the cut-out chip, it seems like free money. Wake up sore, sometimes, but that's it. Renting the goods, is all. You aren't in, when it's all happening. House has software for whatever a customer wants to pay for. . . . Fine. I was getting my money. Trouble was, the cut-out circuitry and the circuitry the Chiba clinics put in weren't compatible. So the worktime started bleeding in, and I could remember it.... But it was just bad dreams, and not all bad. . . . Then it started getting strange. . . . The house found out what I was doing with the money. I had the blades in, but the fine neuromotor work would take another three trips. No way I was ready to give up puppet time. . . . So the bastard who ran the place, he had some custom software cooked up. Berlin, that's the place for snuff, you know? Big market for mean kicks, Berlin. I never knew who wrote the program they switched me to, but it was based on all the classics. . . .
>
> The dreams got worse and worse, and I'd tell myself that at least some of them <u>were</u> just dreams, but by then I'd started to figure out that the boss had a whole little <u>clientele</u> going for me. Nothing's too good for Molly, the boss says, and gives me this shit raise. . . . That prick was charging <u>eight</u> times what he was paying me, and he thought I didn't know. (Gibson, <u>Nm</u> 147-48)

This passage is reminiscent of Jeter's <u>Dr. Adder</u> in its description of women's bodies as objects for men to mold as they desire, in order to increase their exchange value. The women who act as "meat puppets" are totally divested of all feeling in order to gratify the male customer's desires:

> W[illiam] G[ibson]: In "Burning Chrome", the guy says that the orgasms are like little silver flares right out at the edge of space, and that's the...
>
> T[imothy] L[eary]: That's the guy's orgasm, not hers. She's not even feeling it.
>
> WG: Well, she can feel it a little bit, maybe...
> (Gibson & Leary 61)

Knowing that at one point Molly served as a kind of animated centerfold presents another opportunity to elaborate on the reasons for her mirror implants. In a book titled Pictures of Women: Sexuality, Jane Root describes the "look" in the eyes of centerfold models that indicates total submission to the viewer of the pornography. A quotation she cites from the Hite report describes the desires of the male viewer that dictate the necessity of this "look":

> My female (picture) must be looking straight into the camera lens (my eyes) to be most useful. The more intent her stare or gaze, the more suitable. . . . She and I have direct contact. As most of the best "centerfolds" are posed this way it would seem that my desires are quite universal and well understood by the publishers.
> (44)

Molly's lenses destroy the possibility of this link ever occurring, and frustrate the attempts of the male penetrating gaze.

The fight against that gaze, traditionally the prerogative of the male artist, characterizes Molly's relationship with and hatred of Peter Riviera. The reason she reacts so strongly to his taunting is that he, as a male artist figure, represents the threat of a tradition that would render her as an object. John Berger points out in Ways of Seeing the manner in which the aesthetic conventions of European art reduce women's bodies to a kind of mix-and-match playset for the male artist:

> On the one hand the individualism of the artist, the thinker, the patron, the owner: on the other hand, the person who is the object of their activities--the woman--treated as a thing or as an abstraction.
>
> Dürer believed that the ideal nude ought to be constructed by taking the face of one body, the breasts of another, the legs of a third, the shoulders of a fourth, the hands of a fifth--and so on.
>
> The result would glorify Man. But the exercise presumed a remarkable indifference to who any one person [i.e. woman] really was.
> (62)

As William Gibson explains to Timothy Leary in a recent interview, the piece Riviera performs for Lady 3Jane Tessier-Ashpool, "The Doll," is named afer a real piece of art that works on similar principles:

> There's this amazing German surrealist sculptor named Hans Belmer [sic] who made a piece called "The Doll." He made a doll that was more his fetish object than a work of art. This totally idealized girlchild that could be taken apart and rearranged in an infinite number of ways. So I have Riviera call his piece "The Doll". Belmer's doll.
> (Gibson & Leary 61)

Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément would see this as something akin to another instance of gynesis: the attempt by a man to envision a new path for himself through the image of woman. "It is men who like to play dolls. As we have known since Pygmalion. Their old dream: to be god the mother. The best mother, the second mother, the one who gives the second birth" (Cixous and Clément 66).

Like Linda Lee, Molly is located squarely in the realm of the physical, playing opposite to the cerebral Case. A sort of gynesis comes into play again; Molly's body also acts as a map for Case. Via the simstim process, Molly acts as a kind of living camera during the Sense/Net and straylight runs. She does the actual physical infiltration, and Case rides along as the ultimate voyeur. There is a crucial difference between this partnership and Case's (ab)use of Linda Lee, because Molly is in control. She has consented to this process, and is not acting out of an actual physical dependence on Case for her needs. Case can use Molly only to the extent that she lets him:

> "How you doing, Case?" he heard the words and felt her form them. She slid a hand into her jacket, a fingertip circling a nipple under warm silk. The sensation made him catch his breath. She laughed. But the link was one-way. He had no way to reply.
>
> Two blocks later, she was threading the outskirts of Memory Lane. Case kept trying to jerk her eyes toward landmarks he would have used to find his way. He began to find the passivity of the situation irritating.
> (Gibson, Nm 56)

Case wants to treat her as some kind of elaborate peripheral for his deck, but he is forced into acknowledging her subjectivity. There is an element of sour grapes in Case's assessment of simstim; he dismisses it as a "meat toy," "a gratuitous multiplication of flesh input" (Gibson, Nm 55), probably because it lacks the element of control he seems to require.

During the exploration of the Villa Straylight, Molly functions to some extent as a "medium" for Case (I am using "medium" in two senses, to indicate both a writing surface, and a person who acts as a channel for the "spirits" of cyberspace). Via a digital readout chip in one of her eyes, the artificial intelligence Wintermute sends Case messages via another AI construct, the Dixie Flatline. Gibson's presentation of this section in the text is interesting because he approximates the appearance of this message in Molly's eye through the placement of type:

C A S E : 0 0 0 0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 .

> "Guess it's for you," she said, climbing mechanically. The zeros strobed again and a message stuttered there, in the corner of her vision, chopped up by the display circuit.

G E N E R A L G
I R L I N G : : :
T R A I N E D
C O R T O F O R
S C R E A M I N G
F I S T A N D
S O L D H I S
A S S T O
T H E P E N T
A G O N : : : :
W / M U T E ' S
P R I M A R Y
G R I P O N
A R M I T A G
E I S A
C O N S T R U

C T O F G
I R L I N G : .
W / M U T E
S E Z A ' S
M E N T I O N
O F G
M E A N S
H E ' S
C R A C K
I N G : : : :
W A T C H
Y O U R
A S S : : : :
: : D I X I E
(Gibson, Nm 190-91)

This writing on her body is beyond Molly's control, placed there by an-other (Wintermute) for Case to read, but it does not cause her physical pain or inconvenience, unlike the instances in Count Zero and Mona Lisa Overdrive where the loa write on Angie's body. Angie's body is inscribed several times in the following two books, usually without her consent or knowledge. Molly is prepared for the possibility of corporeal invasion, an inevitability in Gibson's fiction. That state of vigilance, coupled with the ability and desire to keep moving, and to stay one step ahead of the continuous flux of Gibson's everchanging, fragmented world, is what makes her better equipped for survival in that world than Angie or Linda Lee. It also makes her a more interesting hero than Case, Turner (in Count Zero), or any of Gibson's male protagonists. Molly's need to keep moving saves her from the fate of so many novelistic heroines, whose adventures end when they marry the hero at the end of the text. Ironically, Case and Turner both find love interests, and the end of their stories coincides with that moment. Molly, on the other hand, disappears both at the end of Neuromancer and at the end of Mona Lisa Overdrive, when she walks off into the sunset in true heroic style. Her independence allows her to move beyond the bounds of the text, and keeps the possibilities for her story open.

Neuromancer is a complex text, with many good and bad qualities. As it is absorbed into the canon, many people will read it, and laud or damn it for different reasons. For me, the positive aspects of the text are inseparable from the issues I have outlined in this chapter. The unconventional and vivid presence of Molly does much to subvert the more negative aspects of the narrative centered around Case. The possibility for a non-dualistic paradigm of thought that Marie-France's AIs offer is encouraging, even if that possibility does not come to fruition; Gibson's texts seem to be full of thwarted possibilities for women to assert themselves (the other one that comes to mind immediately is this, from Mona Lisa Overdrive: "[Angela] Mitchell, at one time, had the potential to become, well, very central to things, though it's not worth going into"--Gibson, MLO 223). I am beginning to think that one of the signal characteristics of gynesis is that a text in which it is present will offer a hope for re-vision that is never fulfilled. This does not make Neuromancer a bad book, but one that presents some extremely difficult philosophical questions. In the long run, that probably makes it a more valuable text, because people will debate its qualities for many years to come, and that debate may be instrumental in generating some answers to the epistemological crisis that engendered gynesis in the first place.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. This book is one of Gibson's major influences, which I think adds a certain amount of credibility to my argument.

2. The phrase "jack in" increases my conviction that cyberspace cowboys are almost always men because cyberspace is a feminine-gendered space. The act of "jacking in" is quite openly analogous to sexual intercourse:

> INTERVIEW: Your books are very erotic. People put trodes on their heads and "jack in" electronically to one another's brains. Future sex seems to have a lot to do with people not touching each other.
>
> GIBSON: They touched a bit in Neuromancer, but that was written in 1982. It seems hoplessly dated. People wandered around having casual sex like something out of another era. So I had to backpedal a bit.
> (Kelly, "Cyberpunk" 79)

3. It is ironically appropriate that Case, who considers his banishment from cyberspace a fate worse than death, lives in a small sleeping cubicle called a "coffin."

4. For the purposes of this thesis, it is not really worth going into the various types of dualism, but anyone who is interested is directed to "The Man Who Mistook His Brain for His Mind," in The Dreams of Reason, by Heinz Pagels (see bibliography).

5. There actually is one female cowboy in Count Zero, a character named Jaylene Slide. However, she seems to be the "token woman."

6. Actually, it is Molly who points out the connection between male sexuality

and cyberspace, when she says to Case, "I saw you stroking that Sendai; man, it was pornographic" (Gibson, Nm 47). The affinity between sex and entry into cyberspace is present again, at their first sexual encounter: "She rode him that way, impaling herself, slipping down on him again and again, until they both had come, his orgasm flaring blue in a timeless space, a vastness like the matrix" (Gibson, Nm 33).

7. Mississippi Review: What was the inspiration for the cyberspace idea?

Gibson: Watching kids in video arcades. . . . And these kids clearly believed in the space these games projected. Everyone who works with computers seems to develop an intuitive faith that there's some kind of actual space behind the screen--
(Kelly, "Cyberpunk" 79)

8. Linda Lee is associated with ghosts and holograms from the moment that she first appears in the text: "He'd found her, one rainy night, in an arcade. Under bright ghosts burning through a blue haze of cigarette smoke, holograms of Wizard's Castle. . ." (Gibson, Nm 8).

9. "Neuromancer," the boy said, slitting long gray eyes against the rising sun. "The lane to the land of the dead. Where you are, my friend. Marie-France, my lady, she prepared this road, but her lord choked her off before I could read the book of her days. Neuro from the nerves, the silver paths. Romancer. Necromancer. I call up the dead. But no, my friend," and the boy did a little dance, brown feet printing in the sand, "I am the dead, and their land." He laughed.
(Gibson, Nm 244)

10. The Turing test, invented by British scientist Alan Turing, states that if an interrogator in a double-blind situation is unable to tell a machine from a human, that machine can think, and is, essentially, alive (see Hofstadter, Gödel

594-99). Gibson's Turing police, who monitor AIs to ensure that they don't become too intelligent, are named after him.

11. See the section concerning downloading and transcendence at the end of chapter 4 of this thesis.

12. The only character who fills a similar role in Gibson's fiction is Turner in Count Zero, but he exists only to show the (near) impossibility of that kind of hero in this milieu. Gibson explains:

> Turner is a kind of detective, a deconstructed [literally and figuratively; ed.] thriller guy. I wanted to get one of those macho thriller guys, a real he-man straight out of the kit, and just kind of push him apart. I never was quite able to do it. The scene that works for me the most is when he kills the wrong man. There's a slow build and then he blows the shit out of somebody and someone says to him, "So-and-so's the agent here, you asshole."
> (Wershler-Henry, "Queen" 33)

Perhaps this is another instance of gynesis at work; the catalog of possible male thriller heros being exhausted, the artist's imagination turns to woman to fill the gap.

13. The following passage, excerpted from Octave Mirbeau's The Torture Garden, illustrates the hellish extreme of this gaze:

> "Ah, poet! poet! [sic]" exclaimed my father, who was not interested for a moment in the masterpieces which carried me away with enthusiasm; "Art! art! [sic] Beauty! Do you know what it is? Well, my boy, it is a woman's abdomen, open and all bloody, with the hemostats in place!"
> (13)

Those interested in investigating this subject further are directed to the films of David Cronenberg, especially Dead Ringers and Videodrome.

Chapter 3

Count Zero: Strive to Live Hourly in Your Own Flesh

> --And the Invisible Man said:
> "These colorless sheets are what flesh is made from--becomes flesh when it has color and writing--That is Word and Image write the message that is you on colorless sheets determine all flesh."
>
> -William S. Burroughs, Nova Express (30)

> She was, of course, naked, and her body would be the medium through which this strange sacrament would be attempted.
>
> -Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea, Illuminatus! (117)

Count Zero is a book that suffers from "Second Novel Syndrome": in the wake of a first novel as good as Neuromancer, it could only be a disappointment to many readers. The particular type of book that it is exacerbates the problem; it is not so much a novel as a long piece of metafiction, a text that is more about the author using fictional characters as tools for making a statement about writing than fictional characters as "real people" (as in a realist novel). This condition is the source of much of the criticism leveled at the book, even when the reviewer--John Clute, in the following example--acknowledges that developing "round" characters may not have been Gibson's intent at all:

> If there is something lacking, it is that sense that the cast are a series of claptraps (ie [sic] tricks to gain applause of audience or of oneself), that they cannot introspect, or gain their souls. . . .
> It may also be that Mr [sic] Gibson was not attempting to shape his text or utter certain kinds of humanistic piety. (96)

This kind of reaction is not really surprising. As Ken Hughes explains in Signs of Literature, readers have given privileged status to the "round" characters

found in realist texts ever since E. M. Forster's Aspects of the Novel:

> [Forster] divides characters into the FLAT and the ROUND, declaring flat characters to be mere types and the round ones --the self moving individuals--to be authentic individuals. In this bold sweep, Forster resignifies the whole of Literature. He privileges one kind of novel character, and subordinates the rest of Literature to an inferior position. In fact there are no privileged positions in Literature that can be defended beyond the level of mere assertion by authority. Character is a relational term. The kind of character used will be determined in its main outlines by the form of the discourse universe the character must inhabit. (135)

Glib though its expression might be, Clute's latter sentiment is reasonably accurate. Gibson has no real interest in ensuring his readers are comfortable with any aspect of his writing; if anything, the opposite is true. "Round" characters would be as much of an anachronism in Neuromancer or Count Zero as a horse and buggy[1].

In fact, one of the points that Gibson seems to be insisting on in Count Zero is that the postmodern condition makes it impossible to treat fictional characters as "round" or "whole." The opening paragraphs of the book, which introduce the character of Turner, provide more than adequate support for this conclusion:

> Because he had a good contract, he was in Singapore an hour after the explosion. Most of him, anyway. The Dutch surgeon liked to joke about that, how an unspecified percentage of Turner hadn't made it out of Palam International on that first flight and had to spend the night there in a shed, in a support vat.
>
> It took the Dutchman and his team three months to put Turner together again. They cloned a square meter of skin for him, grew it on slabs of collagen and shark-cartilage polysaccharides. They bought eyes and genitals on the open market. The eyes were green. (Gibson, CZ 1)

Turner is a "flat" character because he is all surface, little more than the sum of his body parts, at least to his employers. However, he is an effective

tool, so his corporate masters have a vested interest in keeping him in operating condition.

When Neuromancer was released, many critics made comparisons between it and Alfred Bester's classic The Demolished Man; Count Zero's opening, with Turner as its own "demolished man," seems to be a wry comment about that comparison. It also helps to locate Count Zero (and Gibson's other novels, to some extent) within the same narrative tradition as Bester's work: the "hard-boiled" thriller. As Tom Maddox suggests in "Cobra, She Said," Gibson's characters are "flat" precisely because the genre demands it. "The writing must be intense, the action violent, the atmosphere erotically charged" in order to achieve the "affect" Gibson wants. "[Neuromancer's--and Count Zero's, I would add] supposed flaws--plot fatigue, weak character development--are in fact manifestations of its strength and modernity" (Maddox, "Cobra" 47).

As much as I concur with Maddox's generic location of Gibson's first two novels, I disagree strongly with his statement that Gibson should continue to write within the constraints of this genre to ensure continued relevance:

> [C]ritics or reviewers who are waiting for Gibson to make some radical move outside this [i.e. the hard-boiled thriller] framework are simply kidding themselves. For him to do so would be no more or less unexpected than of Robert Stone or John Le Carre [sic]. And no more or less ill-advised. If Gibson is going to go anywhere, he cannot relinquish the values of the hard-boiled thriller.
> ("Cobra" 47)

My main objection to this statement stems from the fact that the hard-boiled thriller is an inherently misogynistic genre. The following is an excerpt from the afterword to the Re/Search edition of two "hardboiled" Charles Willeford novels, High Priest of California and Wild Wives. Editors Andrea Juno and V. Vale comment on the resurgent popularity of the genre, as well as its

aforementioned misogyny:

> America is rediscovering, on a massive scale, the cynical, hard-boiled novels (Jim Thompson, David Goodis, Charles Willeford, and others) that were a product of the fifties/early sixties--the last transitional decade before television saturated language. . . .
>
> While masculine and feminine characterizations were often ludicrously polarized, nevertheless a harsh, deeply realistic unsentimentality prevailed, occasionally varying toward dark, psychotic depths. . . .
>
> Charles Willeford's 1953 first novel, The High Priest of California, offers a rare treat: the opportunity to see the world through the eyes of a ruthless, misogynistic, near-psychopath, used-car salesman Russell Haxby, without moral comment on his acts.
> ("Afterword," in Willeford, Wild 5)

The hard-boiled thriller is a conservative form, not a revolutionary one. How can any truly innovative writing come out of a genre that preserves stereotypes and sex-roles as old as Western civilization?

I don't think Gibson's original intent was to remain within the genre's confines at all, but rather to explode them. My evidence for this contention comes from both a statement Gibson made about hardboiled thriller author Raymond Chandler--"I'd like to go on record as saying that I don't like Raymond Chandler. I think he's kind of an interesting stylist but I just found him to be this creepy puritanical sick fuck" (Wershler-Henry, "Queen" 33)--and from the graphic allusion to The Demolished Man in the opening lines of Count Zero. Turner's violent introduction to the reader is a kind of grisly double-entendre that sets the agenda for the deconstruction of the male thriller protagonist.

> [William Gibson]: Turner is a kind of detective, a deconstructed [literally and figuratively; ed.] thriller guy. I wanted to get one of those macho thriller guys, a real he-man straight out of the kit, and just kind of push him apart.
> (Wershler-Henry, "Queen" 33)

Apparently, that task was not enough of a challenge; Gibson says in another interview that "I lost interest in doing that fairly early on, and that's when I introduced the other plotlines" (Greenland 8). In my opinion, this was an unfortunate turn of events, because, when Gibson abandoned his original plan for the Turner plotline, the revolutionary potential of the text was seriously compromised (from a feminist perspective at least). I will discuss this point at greater length when I consider the book's final chapter.

As might be expected in a text that strives to be innovative but experiences difficulty escaping traditional sex-roles, gynesis plays a large part in Count Zero. All of the book's characters are important chiefly because of their use-value; this is doubly true of the women in the book, such as those Turner sleeps with in the opening chapter. The following passage describes one of these women:

> A stranger's face, but not the one his life in hotels had taught him to expect. He would have expected a routine beauty, bred out of cheap elective surgery and the relentless Darwinism of fashion, an archetype cooked down from the major media faces of the previous five years.
> (Gibson, CZ 3)

She (whoever she is) is one of many faceless, nameless women Turner sleeps with after his "accident." They are identical because they are commodities, bought with Turner's elite black and gold credit chip (Gibson, CZ 2)--but then woman is traditionally use-value for man, as Luce Irigaray says (This 31). These women are useful to Turner for more than just the fleeting comforts of sex (and this is where gynesis comes into play...); Turner is on a quest, and they are the markers along the "road to recovery," as much alike as stripes down the median of a highway. One of their number (not nameless, but almost) will mark the successful beginning of that quest, by showing him the way back to a sense of

self, and by providing some indication of what it is that he is looking for.

The first suggestion that this woman might be serving as a map for Turner is that he singles her out from the homogenous mass of nameless women he has slept with in the same manner that Case did with Linda Lee, and Bobby Quine did with Rikki[2]:

> Something Midwestern in the bone of the jaw, archaic and American. The blue sheets were rucked across her hips, the sunlight angling in through hardwood louvers to stripe her long thighs with diagonals of gold. The faces he woke with in the world's hotels were like God's own hood ornaments. Women's sleeping faces, identical and alone, aimed straight out to the void. But this one was different. Already, somehow, there was meaning attached to it. Meaning and a name. (Gibson, CZ 3)

During their time together in Mexico, she shows Turner through their lovemaking that he is a whole person inwardly, as the outer scars that mark him as some sort of inhuman composite creature fade: "His tan was dark and even. The angular patchwork left by the Dutchman's grafts was gone, and she had taught him the unity of his body. Mornings, when he met the green eyes in the bathroom mirror, they were his own" (Gibson, CZ 6).

Allison is the name of the woman Turner falls in love with in Mexico[3]. However, she cannot reciprocate his love, mostly because she, like Turner, is another tool of the corporations, a field psychologist doing her job in helping to put Turner back together (Gibson, CZ 9). The chief difference between them is that Allison is cognizant of the true nature of the situation while Turner is not. And why should he be? At this point in the narrative, Turner still looks very much like the typical thriller protagonist; Allison may be merely a useful crutch, but so are the female characters in the great majority of hardboiled texts. Just before he rudely awakens Turner to the reality of his situation, Gibson highlights the extent to which both Allison and Turner are tools being

manipulated by their employers by allowing Allison to become cynical about her status as object: "'Fuck it.' Her shoulders began to heave. She took a deep breath . . . . 'It, me, what's it matter?'" (Gibson, CZ 7). Ultimately, Allison is as disposable as all of the near-identical women in Turner's life. Outwardly, she looks like what Turner wants, but her role as corporate employee negates (for Turner) any kind of genuine difference from those other women. Anything Allison told Turner about herself could have been fabricated as part of his rehabilitation program.

Indications of the true nature of what Turner is searching for are first articulated by Webber, another woman--and another signpost on Turner's quest. She articulates what is wrong with Turner's life, and reveals to him the goal of his quest through her own example:

> "I figure the ones like you and Sutcliffe, you aren't from any place at all. This is where you live, isn't it, Turner? On the site, today, the day your boy comes out. Right?" . . . .
>
> "But you have people? You got a man to go back to?"
>
> "A woman, you want to know," she said. . . . She squinted at him. "We got a kid, too. Ours. She carried it."
>
> "DNA splice?"
>
> She nodded.
>
> "That's expensive," he said.
>
> "You know it; wouldn't be here if we didn't need to pay it off. But she's beautiful."
>
> "Your woman?"
>
> "Our kid."
>
> (Gibson, CZ 72)

Turner is looking for something far away from the twilight zone he inhabits in the interstices of the corporate world; what he craves is the promise of a kind of domesticity. What Turner (jet-setting, high-living, man-of-action Turner) really wants is to settle down with an old-fashioned country girl.

The setting in which Allison's name first appears provides further clues as to what Turner is searching for in women. A line on page 136 of Count Zero reads, "His eyes were level with the band of brown belly where [Sally's] shorts rode low, her navel a soft shadow, and remembering Allison in the white hollow room, he wanted to press his face there, taste it all...", which recalls a passage on page five: "Now, in the white cave, he knelt on tile. He lowered his head, licking her." Presumably, Sally (Turner's brother Rudy's live-in lover) has in actuality what Turner only thought he saw in Allison. Turner first meets Sally at his childhood home, a farm somewhere in the midwestern United States, and he will end the novel with her there, in a very unlikely reenactment of the American pastoral. Gibson says, in an interview with Colin Greenland, that

> When I wrote the part where he escapes with the girl in the jet, I didn't know where they'd come down, and suddenly they were in what in some ways was my childhood, in the countryside--I don't think I even said which state, somewhere like Tennessee or Virginia. They're back in a sort of pastoral world: there's running water; you can't see the cities. (8)

There is more than a little wish-fulfilment going on here; Sally is the actualization of what Turner only thought he saw in Allison, i.e. the girl next door, "Midwestern... archaic and American" (Gibson, CZ 3). Complicating matters further is the fact that his attraction to both of these women seems to be motivated largely by guilt over his absence from his mother's deathbed.

> "She kept asking for you," Rudy said. "After a while it got so bad, the endorphin analogs couldn't really cut the pain, and every two hours or so, she'd ask where you were, when you were coming."
>
> "I sent you money," Turner said. "Enough to take her to Chiba. The clinics there could have tried something new."
>
> Rudy snorted. "Chiba? Jesus. She was an old woman. What the hell good would it have done, keeping her alive in Chiba for a few more months? What she mainly wanted was to see you."
>
> "Didn't work out that way," Turner said. . . .
>
> (Gibson, CZ 156)

This guilt seems be a large part of what is at the root of Turner's affection for Sally: "Busy taking plates from the cabinet above the sink, the cheap brown laminate of the cabinet doors triggering a sudden rush of nostalgia in Turner, seeing her tanned wrists as his mother's...." (Gibson, CZ 132). There are few other explanations for his decision to spend the rest of his life with a woman he has known for about a day.

The fact that Turner eventually does get a "happily ever after" with Sally in the book's final chapter is, for me, the most disappointing aspect of the text, because it signals a total abandonment of the original radical plan to deconstruct the male thriller protagonist. In a way, it is a renunciation of the ethic with which Gibson began the book, the ethic that dominates his other novels[4]. Ken Hughes, in his discussion of "Naive Realism and the Unified Ego," outlines the reasons that make the re-unification of "the deconstructed man" (Turner) and the subsequent happy ending an essentially conservative plot structure:

> Traditional liberal values produced the ideology of the unified ego or "I". Realist texts take the unified ego (the equilibrium at the beginning of the text), set it into conflict over values with other egos to disrupt or disunify it (the disequilibrium in the greater part of the text), then resolve the value conflict with an affirmation of values and monological closure (final equilibrium). This affirms the unity of the ego, and massages the reader of these readerly texts into believing that, despite conflict in the reader's (empirical) world, all will turn out well. The process of reading these texts thus reproduces the ideology of the unified ego in readers, a task well served at the level of "popular" Literature by Harlequin romances. Belief in this ideology glosses over the reality of fragmented modern society, fragmented psyches and bad dreams.
> (135)

It is definitely worth noting that in Mona Lisa Overdrive, the Finn tells Molly that Case (of all people) has come to a similar fate: "Last I heard, he had four

kids...." (MLO 137).

Because of Gibson's decision to abandon his original project with the character, Turner is of relatively little importance in and of himself. Far more important is the manner in which he interacts with Angela Mitchell. The character of Angela Mitchell (Angie) is crucially important to this thesis, because she represents one of the most clear-cut and complex examples of gynesis at work in Gibson's fiction. Inscribed by various technologies and power structures, her body (as writing medium--Burroughs' "colorless sheet") becomes the bridge (woman as spiritualist/medium) between the loa and various human characters--all men--who desire an "other" source of power.

Angie's case demonstrates quite clearly Alice Jardine's theorem that gynesis is not a positive step in the re-thinking of the fictional representation of women. Christopher Mitchell, Turner, Lucas and Beauvoir, Bobby, and Hilton Swift all see Angie as the embodiment of their desire. We witness the slow obliteration of her personality as they re-write it to suit their needs (Angie as human cyberspace deck, as sacrificial offering, as signpost, as Vyèj Mirak--Our lady, Virgin of Miracles, as perfect lover, as simstim star, as drug addict). Under all of these inscriptions, the blueprint of the original human being becomes lost; there is no room for Angie to be herself. Caught between the pressures of forces of the physical world and cyberspace who are struggling to control her flesh, Angie is crushed and annihilated.

The "writing" on Angie's body takes actual physical form as the vévés her father grafted onto her brain (printed circuits laid out in long-chain organic molecules). "Your father drew vévés in your head: he drew them in a flesh that was not flesh" (Gibson, MLO 19). The immediate associations are with the assertion of male authority and tradition, and are drawn from the disciplines

of psychoanalysis and religion: The Law-of-the-Father[5], the mark of Cain. Christopher Mitchell, like many men of "science" before him (Joseph Mengele comes to mind) uses his privileged position as father and scientist to achieve his own desire, and simultaneously manages to mask it behind supposedly benevolent medical reasons.

> "Angie," he said, "when Rudy scanned you, he found something in your head."
> She stopped chewing.
> "He didn't know what it was. Something someone put there, maybe when you were a lot younger. Do you know what I mean?"
> She nodded.
> "Do you know what it is?"
> She swallowed. "No."
> "But you know who put it there?"
> "Yes."
> "Your father?"
> "Yes."
> "Do you know why?"
> "Because I was sick."
> "How were you sick?"
> "I wasn't smart enough."
> (Gibson, CZ 154-55)

This is a mode of body inscription that operates in an entirely different manner from Molly's self-inscription in Neuromancer. As Elizabeth Grosz says, "power is inscribed on and by bodies through modes of social supervision and discipline as well as self-regulation" (Grosz 2). Unlike the protective augmentations Molly consciously purchased for her body, the markings on Angela's body were placed there without her knowledge or consent. The issue of whether or not they empower her to act more effectively in a societal context is highly problematic.

From the first mention of the vévés in Count Zero, there is a kind of potential malevolence to them: "'Jesus.' Rudy wiped his hands across his mouth. 'It shadows like a tumor, on the scans, but her crits are high enough, normal'. . . . 'Fucking hell'. . . . 'I'm amazed she can walk'" (Gibson, CZ 133). That malevolence becomes more overt when Turner discovers "Angela Mitchell['s IQ] was

well above the norm. Had been, all along" (Gibson, CZ 202). In fact, Turner comes to see Christopher Mitchell's true motivation for performing this inscription on his daughter's body as blatantly diabolical:

> Faust.
> Mitchell had cut a deal. Turner might never know the details of the agreement, or Mitchell's price, but he knew he understood the other side of it. What Mitchell had been required to do in return.
> Legba, Samedi, spittle curling from the girl's contorted lips.
> And the train swept into old Union in a black blast of midnight air.
> (Gibson, CZ 203-04)

Angie becomes a third kind of "medium," the medium of exchange between her father and demonic forces: she is the price of her father's success. This recalls Luce Irigaray's dictum that "Women are marked phallically by their fathers, husbands, procurers. This stamp(ing) determines their value in sexual commerce" (Irigaray, in Marks and de Courtivron 105). There are other moments in the text where the existence of this relationship is made explicit, such as the following snippet of song:

> "My daddy he's a handsome devil
> got a chain 'bout nine miles long
> And from every link
> A heart does dangle
> Of another maid
> He's loved and wronged."
> (Gibson, CZ 162)

This little piece of verse plays off both the aforementioned Faustian reference ("My daddy he's a handsome devil") and the idea that men contol women as commodities (the rest of the stanza), but it offers no overt authorial criticism of these conditions. In Gibson's fictions, they are merely facts of existence.

Amorality is a peculiar thing; its proponents claim that it is a great leveller, and makes all people equal, at least in potential. When examined

closely, though, it seems to be a concept that is conceivable only by the privileged. The application of the idea of body-as-map to Gibson's writing illustrates that it is almost always the case that those with more power inscribe their desire onto those with less power, and that women are almost always on the side of the disenfranchised. For example, Angie the small child is the writing medium for the (male) scribe, her father. Once inscribed (as the plates for printing paper currency are inscribed, as the paper itself is imprinted), she becomes the medium of exchange, her "self" traded for the object of the father's desire. Finally, as she bridges that gap, as she is exchanged between men, (Christopher Mitchell to Turner to Lucas and Beauvoir to Bobby to Hilton Swift) she is the spiritual medium, and the map that they follow in search of their respective desires.

(It is worth noting as a sort of "aside" that the motives of the loa, the entities who are ultimately responsible for providing Christopher Mitchell with the knowledge to write the vévés onto Angie's brain, remain completely obscure. The only hint Gibson provides as to the motivation behind any of their meddlings with humanity comes on the last page of Mona Lisa Overdrive, from another AI: "'my own feeling,' Colin said, 'is that it's all so much more amusing, this way....'" (Gibson, MLO 260). The loa are not really a factor in the power struggle over Angie because, like the gods of ancient Greece, they play at the game of people for their own diversion and little more).

The marks Angie's father leaves upon her could easily be described as the physical manifestation of the Lacanian Law-of-the-Father. Written on her flesh by the possessor of the phallus (written with the pen/is), they illustrate her worth to other groups of men eager for power. As Sandra M. Gilbert says in her introduction to The Newly Born Woman, "A Tarantella of Theory," "the pen/penis

has been the privileged marker that was thought to leave the most significant traces on the apparent vacancy of nature, the blank spaces that had to be filled to 'make' history" (Gilbert, in Cixous and Clément xvii). The first men other than Angela's father to recognize this worth are Lucas and Beauvoir, two "oungans." Their rather Foucauldian view of the functioning of power relations typefies those relations in the whole of Gibson's fiction: "we are concerned with getting things done. If you want, we're concerned with systems" (Gibson, CZ 77); "'To serve with both hands' is an expression we have, sort of means they work both ends. White and black, got me?" (Gibson, CZ 78). Labels like black and white, good and evil, magic and technology do not concern them because, in their minds, the distinctions are artificial ones that only mark different loci on the "grid of intelligibility of the social order [i.e. power]" (Foucault, History v. 1, 93). This allows for a peculiar ambiguity in their handling of Angie: while they are quite kind to her, she is still an involuntary guest, and she lives according to their agenda.

Angie is not important to them as Angela Mitchell, woman, but as a kind of abstract demigod/power source:

> "We need to know about the Virgin, Count." The man waited.
> Bobby blinked at him.
> "Vyèj Mirak"--and the glasses went back on--"Our Lady, Virgin of Miracles. We know her"--and he made a sign with his left hand--as Ezili Freda."
> (Gibson, CZ 58)

The Virgin archetype, borrowed by voodoo from Roman Catholicism, is one side of the traditional dualist view of women (i.e. virgin/whore), the spiritual, non-physical "safe" side. Episcopalian bishop and theologian John Shelby Spong points out in Into the Whirlwind that

> The Virgin Mary that we meet in the tradition and the mythology of the Western Catholic world is consistently man's version of what a woman should be. Mary is woman defined,

> circumscribed, and idealized by men who accept without questioning a particular male orientation. The male prejudice against women was so deep and so intense that man's version of the ideal woman was both dehumanized and desexed, and only by this process could she achieve that ideal status of female perfection. Women would never have defined woman this way.
>
> Mary's humanity was irrevocably compromised by the assertion that she was immaculately conceived and bodily assumed. These two doctrines suggested that her entrance into life and her departure from life were abnormal and unhuman. . . . Her female sexual capability was removed from her by the stories of her virgin birth and the later tradition of her perpetual virginity . . . . Somehow in our strange negative heritage we seem to believe that everything that comes out of the woman's body save for tears is evil.
> (94-95)

The image of the Virgin is essentially a device for social control; "Mary served the desires of those men who created this holy ideal of what they thought all women should be and then imposed it on their women" (Spong 95). In societies where the Virgin archetype is a powerful force, those women who do not attempt to comply with the restrictive standards set by this model have traditionally been outsiders, the object of male disapproval[6]. This invites comparison with Molly, because Molly is so clearly representative of the Virgin's opposite, the physical, carnal dangerous woman (Eve/Lilith). The results of a comparison between Molly and Angie are similar to the conclusions reached earlier; Molly's fate seems by far the more preferable of the two.

But what of the power that is to be gained by achieving semi-divine status? Any actual power that the Virgin may possess is severely curtailed by the role she is required to play in the social structure.

> Mary's chief role was that of intercessor, which was also not surprisingly the role of the mother in medieval patriarchal family life. The mother was never the judge. She never made power decisions. The judge was always the husband and father, who was the source of power, authority, and discipline. The mother's sole function was to intercede. She could plead for mercy in the handing down of punishment, but her only real power lay in her ability to move the lordly male to compassion and pity. (Spong 95)

Compare this description to the role Angie plays in the only incident in Count Zero where she actually does anything in cyberspace:

> ::: WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WHY ARE THEY DOING THAT TO YOU?
> Girlvoice, brownhair, darkeyes...
> : KILLING ME KILLING ME GET IT OFF GET IT OFF
> Darkeyes, desertstar, tanshirt, girlhair--
> ::: BUT IT'S A TRICK, SEE? YOU ONLY THINK IT'S GOT YOU. LOOK.
> NOW I FIT HERE AND YOU AREN'T CARRYING THE LOOP.
> (Gibson, CZ 18)

It seems that Angie does have some power, but only as an intercessor on Bobby's behalf. When Beauvoir and Lucas re-invent Angie as the Vvêj Mirak, elevating her to the realm of the mental (cyberspace), she gains precious little, and loses a piece of her humanity under the pretense of gaining power in the male realm. Similarly, the biblical Mary lost most of her humanity when she became the Blessed Virgin Mary, and was assumed into heaven (the model for the exalted non-physical realm of male power prevalent at the time, analogous to cyberspace).

As the various images of Angie in trance-state show, being a medium in Gibson's fiction is physically taxing in the extreme. It is not surprising, then, that the only mediums we see (Angie and Jackie) are both women, because the objectification/commodotization of women that takes place in gynesis allows for the following kind of rationalization: if women are to some extent objects with use-value for men (writing surfaces, empty vessels), the physical strain they experience is of less consequence. Further, as Cixous and Clément point out, "Being possessed is not desirable for a masculine Imaginary, which would interpret it as passivity--a dangerous feminine position" (Cixous and Clément 86)[7]. The objectification of women in the following passage (and the gynesis that is possible as a result of that objectification) is quite obvious: "'Think of Jackie as a deck, Bobby, a cyberspace deck, a very pretty one with nice

ankles.' Lucas grinned and Bobby blushed. 'Think of Danbala, who some people call the snake, as a program. Say as an icebreaker. Danbala slots into the Jackie deck, Jackie cuts ice. That's all'" (Gibson, CZ 114). Actually, that's not all, at least not according to William S. Burroughs, who sees the destruction of the person being controlled in such a manner as being highly likely.

> [I]f I establish complete control somehow, as by implanting electrodes in a brain, then my subject is little more than a tape recorder, a camera, a robot. You don't control a tape recorder--you use it. Consider the distinction, and the impasse implicit here. All control systems try to make control as tight as possible, but at the same time, if they succeeded completely, there would be nothing left to control
> . . . .
> It is highly questionable whether a human organism could survive complete control.
> (Adding 116-17)

The heavy toll that the loa take on their horses would tend to confirm Burroughs' doubts about the ability of a human being to survive complete control.

Although Beauvoir and Lucas recognize Angie's worth earliest, it is Turner who actually utilizes Angie as a map, in what may be the most literal application of gynesis to Gibson's fiction. Consider the following passage, which describes one of the incidences of Angie's possession by the loa:

> Turner risked a glance, saw a silver thread of drool descend from her rigid lips. The deep muscles of her face had contorted into a mask he didn't know. "Who are you?"
> "I am the Lord of Roads."
> "What do you want?"
> "This child for my horse, that she may move among the towns of men. It is well that you drive east. Carry her to your city. I shall ride her again. And Samedi rides with you, gunman. He is the wind you hold in your hands, but he is fickle, the Lord of Graveyards, no matter that you have served him well..." He turned in time to see her slump sideways in the harness, her head lolling, mouth slack.
> (Gibson, CZ 184)

By virtue of the vévés drawn in her head, Angie is "ridden" (written?) by "the Lord of Roads," Legba, "master of roads and pathways, the loa of communication" (Gibson, CZ 58), for the express purpose of providing guidance for Turner on his journey. Again, the physical toll this possession takes on Angie is obvious... but of less importance than getting the male protagonist to his goal.

Angie-as-map for Turner is a logical and explicit development from Allison-as-map. As Case's relationships with Linda Lee and Molly in Neuromancer show, sexual intercourse is one of the most frequent sites for gynesis--the male character reading the female character's body. While Turner and Angie do not have sex, they are frequently in close proximity, and there is the suggestion that it could occur at any of these instances. On one such occasion, immediately preceding an incident of possession, Turner's "tracing" of the lines on Angie's body spurs a memory of sex with Allison:

> The black sweatshirt half unzipped, he traced the fragile line of her collarbone with a fingertip. Her skin was cool, moist with a film of sweat. She clung to him.
>
> He closed his eyes and saw his body in a sun-striped bed, beneath a slow fan with blades of brown hardwood. His body pumping, jerking like an amputated limb, Allison's head thrown back, mouth open, lips taut across her teeth.
> (Gibson, CZ 200)

If there is any pleasure at all in this recollection, it is extremely difficult to locate. However, it does establish certain links between the three characters, links that strengthen the case for the presence of gynesis in Turner's relationship with both women. When associated with the intercourse with Allison that helped him re-discover his humanity, Turner's touching of Angie becomes an act of body map reading. Conversely, the rictus on Allison's face during their lovemaking invokes the image of Angie in a state of possession, and, by association, the presence of a higher force behind both women that is

attempting to guide Turner for its own ends.

Angie's only real power in her capacity as some sort of voodoo holy woman derives from situations where she is literally out of control of her body, because some AI entity has occupied it (she cannot yet control her forays into cyberspace; they occur in dreams, for the most part--Gibson, CZ 158). The dubious nature of this power is very close to that of the sorceress/hysteric, described in "The Guilty One," the opening essay in Hélène Cixous' and Catherine Clément's The Newly Born Woman. The essay seems to be intended as a response to various attempts to re-empower, rewrite the history of, and reassert the validity of two of the most visible groups of repressed women in history: the sorceress and the female hysteric. Following is an example of one such attempt, an excerpt from an article entitled "Witchcraft and Women's Culture," written by well-known pagan theologian and feminist theorist Starhawk:

> The Goddess has at last stirred from sleep, and women are reawakening to our ancient power. The feminist movement, which began as a political, economic, and social struggle, is opening to a spiritual dimension. In the process, many women are discovering the old religion, reclaiming the word witch and, with it, some of our lost culture.
> (262)

Teresa de Lauretis, in the preface to Alice Doesn't, invokes the name of Alice James, diarist and sister of Henry and William James, in another such attempt. Alice James was a hysteric; de Lauretis invokes her as one whose illness is emblematic of "the unqualified opposition of feminism to existing social relations, its refusal of given definitions and cultural values" (de Lauretis vii). In effect, she rewrites James' hysteria as a kind of defiant artistic creation. Her hysteria becomes the only alternative to creativity permitted her by the restrictions of the times: "Alice James, who produced an illness while her brothers did the writing" (de Lauretis vii).

Cixous and Clément do acknowledge that there is some power in these roles. Both the sorceress and the hysteric partake of the world of the carnivalesque, where the normal is parodied, inverted. Thus, the hysteric, with her "wandering womb," and Angie, with her seizures, are comparable to the circus tumbler: "gymnastic contortions and symptoms are equivalent, and in them woman reveals the unique power to invert her own body" (Cixous and Clément 23). The sorceress, with her magic rituals and parodies of the mass, performs a similar kind of inversion, as would Angie after being initiated into the voodoo rites that are a dark mirror of Roman Catholicism.

As Mikhail Bakhtin points out in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, carnival is largely about the breakdown of the binary structures of thought that are at the root of gynesis: "Carnival brings together, unifies, weds and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid" (Bakhtin, Problems 123), and presumably, men and women. Cixous and Clément take a slightly different tack, claiming that "double" nature of women is naturally carnivalistic:

> Women, whom Marcel Mauss associates with neurotics, ecstatics, drifters, hawkers, jugglers, tumblers, are double. They are allied with what is regular, according to the rules, since they are wives and mothers, and allied as well with those natural disturbances, their regular periods, which are the epitome of paradox, order and disorder.
> (8)

By playing the roles of sorceress and hysteric, women can escape their place as inferior, "other": "having a headache, swinging like little girls or spiders at the end of their silk, having one's feet on the wall is outmaneuvering the Symbolic order, overturning it: it is festival" (Cixous and Clément 24).

For all of this, though, valorizing the role of sorceress or hysteric (the two are really different manifestations of the same kind of repression) is only

a temporary solution, because the power derived from these roles is fleeting:

> These roles are <u>conservative</u> because every sorceress ends up being destroyed, and nothing is registered of her but mythical traces. Every hysteric ends up inuring others to her symptoms, and the family closes around her again, whether she is curable or incurable. This ambiguity is expressed in an escape that marks the histories of sorceress and hysteric with the suspense of ellipses. The end of the sorceress, as Michelet tells it, is not the stake, it is being carried off on a black horse "which from his eyes, from his nostrils spurted fire. She mounted him in a leap. . . . As she left she laughed, the most awful burst of laughter, and disappeared like an arrow . . . . One would like to know, but one will not know, what has become of the wretched woman." Emmy von N . . . ., like Dora, like other hysterics, disappears little by little from the Freudian horizon. News becomes scarce. Does she find another doctor? We don't know what has become of the wretched woman. One might say that because they touched the roots of a certain symbolic structure, these women are so threatened that they have to disappear.
> (Cixous and Clément 5)

This is ultimately Angie's fate as well (at the end of <u>Mona Lisa Overdrive</u>), but I will discuss that in the next chapter.

At the very least, Angie's loss of control of her body ("hysteria," by another name) serves as a kind of marker to the world that indicates her father's megalomania. "Thus the hysterics are accusing: they are pointing--with their paralyses, their dyspneas, their knotted limbs. And they point to either the father, a dreadful figure, or to some other male kin" (Cixous and Clément 42). If she can do litle else, she can serve as a warning to women and other undervalued people of the manner in which those with power will (ab)use them.

Of the three major characters in <u>Count Zero</u>, Turner, Angie, and Marly, this leaves only Marly to discuss. Bobby Newmark, the "Count Zero" from whom the book takes its title, strangely enough, is not really central to the text at all, much less to the functioning of gynesis in the text (he becomes more important in the following book, and will be discussed at that point). Marly is in many

ways the most important of the three. She is the character through whom Gibson comes closest to revealing a consistent poetics of fiction. However, her relation to the topics of gynesis and body writing is far more tenuous than that of Turner or Angie. For this reason, I have left her until last, and will consider her function in less detail, even though I feel I could have easily written an entire chapter on her in a different context. Marly is probably as close as any Gibson character to what we so glibly call a "normal" person--a kind of Everywoman for Western civilization. She is middle class, caucasian, educated; she sports no bizarre body modifications, she has (had) a relatively normal job running a small art gallery, and her problems at the beginning of the text stem from a failed (heterosexual) relationship rather than some complicated involvement with the underworld.

Further, she is more of a "round" character than either Turner or Angie; her emotions and thoughts are presented to us more often, and in a more recognizable form. As such, she is easier for a reader to identify with than the other characters, which is perhaps why Gibson chooses to have his poetics unfold for the reader through her. In the following excerpt from my interview with Gibson, he discusses how the character of Marly is intended to act as a kind of intermediary for the reader:

> [William Gibson]: [L]ook at the art girl, Marly. Marly follows the map in that book. She's the only one who can receive the true map and she goes to the heart of it. She gets an audience with God, essentially, and she does it through her own intellectual capacity and her ability to understand the art.
> . . .
>
> If I was doing a thesis on my work, I would try to figure out what the fuck that Joseph Cornell stuff means in the middle of Count Zero. That's the key to the whole fucking thing, how the books are put together and everything. But people won't see it. I think it actually needs someone with a pretty serious art background to understand it. You know, Robert Longo understood that immediately. I was in New York --I've got a lot of fans who are fairly heavy New York

> artists, sort of "fine art guys," and they got it right away. They read those books around that core. I was actually trying to tell people what I was doing while I was trying to discover it myself.
>
> [Darren Wershler-Henry]: It goes back to Postmodernism, to pieces again, and to making new wholes from fragments, doesn't it?
>
> WG: Yeah. It's sort of like there's nothing there in the beginning, and you're going to make something, and you don't have anything in you to make it out of, particularly, so you start just grabbing little hunks of kipple, and fitting them together, and... I don't know, it seemed profound at the time, but this morning it's like I can't even remember how it works (laughs).
> (Wershler-Henry, "Queen" 41)

Gibson seems to feel that using Marly as an explicatory device[8] was not a total success; however, what she learns about the metaphysics of Gibson's fictional world is as close to an explanation of its workings as he has offered to date.

The manner in which Marly's revelation comes about is through the machinations of one Josef Virek, one of Gibson's fictional world's wealthiest individuals. Virek hires her to trace several intriguing shadow-box-like sculptures that have come into his possession back to their creator. These boxes (a fictional homage to the work of Joseph Cornell), are a sort of symbolic key that can be used to unravel the complicated threads that comprise a Gibson text. The best existing example of this sort of de-coding can be found in Tom Maddox's article "Cobra, She Said," in which he provides probable symbolic meanings for the objects in the box described on page 15 of Count Zero:

> First there are the bones: one from a wing, the other from a human wrist. . . inset with a "biomonitor." These two objects are particularly marked by the pathos of what the boxmaker will call "'time and distance'" (CZ, 257). . . . Primarily, however, a transition is being marked here, one as profound as the birth of modern man in neolithic technology; carbon and silicon, man and machine, are joining. Then, in the fragment of lace, "time and distance" confront fetishism and style--this remnant calls forth the vanished wearer of the lace, who sought to provoke desire, and the observer for whom the lace

> was worn, whose desire was sought. Three circuit-boards with gold-traced mazes: three, a magical number of course, simply enough explained here because CZ has a three-tiered structure: three main characters whose points of view alternate. The mazes are those into which the three stumble; the box's mazes are archaic, thus can be seen, unlike the microchip's, whose circuitry is invisible to the naked eye. And the gold is of course the wealth, the "unnatural field," which creates the mazes: of the zaibatsus--Hosaka, Maas--and of the anachronisms, the Tessier-Ashpool family of Neuromancer, and Virek, the malign Howard Hughes figure of Count Zero.
>
> This leaves only one object, the "smooth white sphere of baked clay." It is perhaps picked from the matrix. . . where the data. . . stand graphically represented, in the forms of pyramid and cube and sphere. Or perhaps it is plucked from one of Joseph Cornell's boxes--many contain balls or spheres. In either case it is simple, inscrutable.
>
> In sum, the box's objects signify inescapably pathetic endings. . . and the golden maze of information technology into which we blunder. (48)

These boxes, then, are heavily overdetermined signifiers, similar to the "map" that men read on women's bodies in gynesis--the map to a desired "other" (in this case, the boxmaker, the physical manifestation of one of the fragments of the Neuromancer-Wintermute mind. This entity serves as the secular god of the fragmented, postmodern universe of Gibson's fiction).

But these maps are sometimes not inscribed on anyone's body--as in the case of the boxes--and it is sometimes a woman following them, not a man. This is, I think, largely what led Gibson to question the idea of gynesis when I suggested it to him as a possible method for reading for his texts.

> [William Gibson]: Well, the thing I would question in that theory, as you paraphrased it, is that women's bodies are the map, and if, for instance, you looked at the sequence in Mona Lisa Overdrive where what's-her-name, the little thing... I forgot her name... Mona! . . . .
>
> Yeah, the eponymous Mona, where she remembers her stud showing up for the first time, when she's working in the catfish farm. All that really sexual stuff happens there before he takes her away. Think about the way she's looking at him, the way she's reading his body.
> (Wershler-Henry, "Queen" 31)

What Gibson suggests is, of course, valid; all bodies, not just those of women, are inscribed in various manners by power structures through the use of diverse technologies. Those processes of inscription are at least partly responsible for the differentiation between sexes in the first place. Foucault suggests "one could show how this idea of sex took form in the different strategies of power and the definite role it played therein" (Foucault, History 152)[9]. However, I do not think that the theory that bodies in general are written on (and thus can be "read" by anyone able to decipher the writing on them) does anything to discount the presence of gynesis. If anything, it makes the presence of gynesis more plausible, because gynesis is a particular type of body inscription frequently found in the work of (usually) male writers with postmodern inclinations. Other types of body writing and reading can--and do--coexist with it.

That being said, I think it is possible to read Marly's search through gynesis, at least in a tentative manner; it just requires the reader to recall who is paying her to search for the boxmaker. When Virek is included in the picture, the case for the presence of gynesis here becomes more plausible. He reads the map of Marly's body in his attempt to find his desired "other," the boxmaker. What Virek is searching after is something that will allow him to transcend his diseased flesh--the old male dream[10]: "He imagines that he can translate himself, code his personality into my fabric. He yearns to be what I once was" (Gibson, CZ 227). He needs Marly's body as a device to reach that end for two reasons. The first is her sense of intuition about art: "I suggest, however, that you work on a scale with which you yourself are comfortable. Otherwise, you run the risk of losing touch with your intuition, and intuition, in a case such as this, is of crucial importance" (Gibson, CZ 15-16). The second

is that Virek himself is physically incapable of carrying out such a search:

> "Forgive me," she found herself saying, to her horror, "but I understood you to say that you live in a--a vat?"
>
> "Yes, Marly. And from that rather terminal perspective, I should advise you to strive to live hourly in your own flesh. Not in the past, if you understand me. I speak as one who can no longer tolerate that simple state, the cells of my body having opted for the quixotic pursuit of individual careers. I imagine that a more fortunate man, or a poorer one, would have been allowed to die at last, or be coded at the core of some bit of hardware. But I seem constrained, by a byzantine net of circumstance that requires, I understand, something like a tenth of my annual income. Making me, I suppose, the world's most expensive invalid. I was touched, Marly, at your affairs of the heart. I envy you the ordered flesh from which they unfold."
>
> And, for an instant, she stared directly into those soft blue eyes and knew, with an instinctive mammalian certainty, that the exceedingly rich were no longer even remotely human. (Gibson, CZ 16)

Even though Virek coldly objectifies Marly--he considers her to be a "resource," and possibly a "subprogram," like Paco[11] (Gibson, CZ 15)--I still find myself reluctant to confidently cite her case as yet another example of gynesis in Gibson's fiction. The main reason for this reluctance is that there is very little to indicate that Marly need be specifically female to suit Virek's plans. A case might be made for her intuition being the "feminine" intuition of popular cliché, but that is scant evidence for building a convincing argument. So, for the time being, I will have to leave my argument for gynesis in Marly's case on this rather provisional note.

While it is disappointing in comparison to Neuromancer, Count Zero is still an important book. It does much to enrich the mythos Gibson established in the earlier text, and is the most articulate statement of his personal poetics that exists to date, despite its faults. From a feminist perspective, the book is perhaps an even bigger disappointment than it would be from any other, because of Gibson's loss of interest in the total deconstruction of Turner, and because

of the increasing presence of gynesis in the Angela Mitchell storyline. In terms of the larger storyline that encompasses all three novels and the sprawl short stories, Count Zero exists chiefly to set up Angie for a fall. Like Cixous' and Clément's witch/hysteric, she cannot continue to exist in the fictional world Gibson has created, because she is of another order. And, as I hope to show in the next chapter, the "transcendence" that she (and Bobby) undergo is of a dubious enough nature that it is small consolation for her various sufferings and eventual death.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. In "Mirrors of the Future City," SF critic Russell Blackford declares that when Gibson does make an attempt at psychological realism, it is "clumsy," and ultimately irrelevant, because the aesthetic of the writing does not necessitate such development:

> [O]n two occasions Molly's actions and attitudes are explicated by lengthy descriptions of her formative experiences. These set-piece concessions to the tradition of psychological realism appear somewhat clumsy and gratuitous, though the point is established that what seems random and unknowable to the twentieth-century reader is simply foreign (for the future is another place) and can be related to a core of understandable responses to ambience and trauma. The permanent mirror-lenses masking the future Samurai girl can be interpreted as a key image of the book: fixing the idea of a novel wherein the future is undeniably opaque to our understanding, even as it reflects and reveals aspects of our own time.
> (21)

(Mona Lisa Overdrive is a slightly different matter, because the focus there is on the characters rather than on the fictional world, but I will be discussing that in the following chapter.)

2. In each case, a woman is singled out as somehow "different" from all the others ("And why should she be?" he asked ironically...):

> You could see his sunglasses scanning those faces as they passed, and he must have decided that Rikki's was the one he was waiting for, the wild card and the luck changer.
> (Gibson, BC 171)

> He'd come in out of the warm rain that sizzled across the Ninsei pavement and somehow she'd been singled out for him, one face out of the dozens who stood at the consoles, lost in the game she played.
> (Gibson, Nm 8)

3. "Hosaka had sent Allison to vet him in Mexico" (Gibson, CZ 157).

4. Molly's statement about the abandoning of romance, "HEY ITS OKAY BUT ITS TAKING THE EDGE OFF MY GAME" (Gibson, Nm 267) could serve as a one-line summary of Count Zero if "MY" was changed to "Gibson's;" ending the text with a scene of domestic bliss is completely antithetical to the last line of Neuromancer: "He [Case] never saw Molly again" (Gibson, Nm 271). I choose to read this as a stylistic lapse rather than an abandonment of the ethic of "the edge" because of the apocalyptic, fragmented nature of the text that follows Count Zero, Mona Lisa Overdrive. The ending of that book is by no means a comforting one, but I will be discussing that in the next chapter.

5. "The father is the Law; the austerity of the Symbolic, the privileged force of the order, come from the looming, immemorial figure of the prehistoric father. This father is overpossessive: the perverse Law. Thou shalt love none other than me" (Cixous and Clément 45).

6. This phenomenon is hardly a thing of the past: "Marina Warner, in her provocative book Alone of All Her Sex, suggests that there is a historic correlation between the popularity of Mary and the low status of women even today" (Spong 96).

7. This statement--that it appears that only women are mediums in Gibson's world--holds true for Count Zero, but not for Mona Lisa Overdrive. "[Angie] saw the loa Linglessou enter Beauvoir in the oumphor, saw his feet scatter the diagrams outlined in white flour" (Gibson, MLO 18).

8. Which may be a form of gynesis in itself...

9. Foucault, and Burroughs, in the epigram to this chapter, both suggest that it is this writing alone that determines sexual difference. Elizabeth Grosz's

position differs slightly in that it takes certain important (but not irreducible) "biological, anatomical, physiological and neuro-physiological" processes into account as well:

> Biology provides a bedrock for social inscription but is not fixed or static substratum: it interacts with and is overlaid by psychic, social and signifying relations. The body can thus be seen not as a blank, passive page, a neutral ground of meaning, but as an active, productive "whiteness" that constitutes the writing surface as resistant to the imposition of any or all patterned arrangements. It has a texture, a tonus, a materiality that is an active ingredient in the messages produced. It is less like a blank, smooth, frictionless surface, a page, and more like a copper plate to be etched.
> (Grosz 7)

10. In "A Tale of Inscription/Fashion Statements," Kim Sawchuk speaks of "a typically masculinist belief that one can be transcendent to one's body; to one's culture, and immune to the seductions of the material world" (68).

11. Paco is an enigmatic figure. As a "subprogram," he is presumably another avatar through which Virek manifests himself, rather than a separate and fully autonomous human being. However, his physical appearance is very close to the form Neuromancer assumes in the novel of the same name. If this is more than coincidence, it could be that Virek is being manipulated by the cyberspace entities (the loa) to a very great extent indeed.

Chapter 4

Mona Lisa Overdrive: Flesh Withdrawal

> I don't need a body
> A body's nobody to me
> It's just a cell
> And I'm leaving well
> When I get you to give me the key
>
> -World Party, "Sweet Soul Dream"

> believe me there is no pain like flesh withdrawal consciously experienced
>
> -William S. Burroughs, "The Beginning is Also the End," The Burroughs File (64)

The cover of Mona Lisa Overdrive is as good a place to start as any in an examination of the text (although Gibson himself probably had very little to do with its design). It depicts a chrome mask of a woman's face--cold and enigmatic in its perfection--floating on a flat black background. The color scheme signals CYBERPUNK in large letters: "chrome and matte black, the Movement's totem colors" (Sterling, Mirrorshades ix). The mask itself serves several functions; its enigmatic expression simultaneously reflects and reshapes (shifts into "overdrive") the historical image of the woman in da Vinci's La Giaconda. Unlike the original Mona Lisa, though, the mask on the cover of Gibson's third novel is not really a portrait of a (specific) woman, but rather "Woman" (generalized and objectified). Its lack of individual character evokes a passage from Henry Miller's Tropic of Capricorn:

> We taxi from one perfect female to another seeking the vulnerable defect, but they are flawless and impermeable in their impeccable lunar consistency. . . .
>
> I no longer look into the eyes of the woman I hold in my arms but I swim through, head and arms and legs, and I see that behind the sockets of the eyes there is a region unexplored, the world of futurity, and here there is no logic whatever, just the still germination of events unbroken by

night and day, by yesterday and tomorrow.
(121)

Deleuze and Guattari cite this passage as "a perfect example of the road to be taken by modern thought" (Jardine, Gynesis 79); Alice Jardine points out in turn that their citation of it has much to do with the process of gynesis. "It has always been the woman's figure, her lack of visage, of individual traits, of identity and humanity, that has saved the male artist" (Jardine, Gynesis 78). If one imagines such a mask as an actual physical object, being viewed by its (male) creator, its highly polished surface would reflect back his own features, distorted into a female shape. Gynesis: man refiguring himself as woman, seeing what he wants in her--new possibilities for himself--without regard for the real woman (with a real name and visage of her own) who may be behind that mask. The blackness behind it is the realm Man wishes to explore, his "other." In Gibson's books that "other" space is cyberspace, which, as I suggested in Chapter 1, may be read as a feminine gendered space. For Gibson's male protagonists, the female (mask) is the doorway to that "world of futurity."

All such abstractions aside, the first sentence of the Miller quotation is strongly evocative of the typical male Gibson protagonist, desperately seeking that intangible something in the face of the women he encounters: Bobby Quine in The Gentleman Loser, Case in the arcades of Night City, and especially Turner, sleeping with women whose faces look like "God's own hood ornaments" (CZ 3). What better description could one ask for of that chrome mask? But, surprisingly, the figure of the male protagonist is almost completely decentered in Mona Lisa Overdrive.

The characters that are important in this, the most radical of Gibson's book-length narratives, are the disenfranchised (usually, but not exclusively,

women): the ones hidden behind the chrome mask in the preceding books. Gibson portrays them, especially the eponymous Mona, sympathetically, as "the SINless": "She was sixteen and SINless, Mona, and this older trick had told her once that was a song, 'Sixteen and SINless.' Meant she hadn't been assigned a SIN when she was born, a Single Identification Number, so she'd grown up on the outside of most official systems" (Gibson, MLO 47). Gibson's treatment of Mona is typical of his handling of the other female characters in the text. Although she does not completely escape her function(s) as "medium," there is a kind of resistance in her that defies the attempts of various male power blocs to overwrite her personality and desires completely.

The first image of Mona the text presents to the reader is one of imprisonment and (ab)use by men:

> Mona dreamed she was dancing the cage back in some Cleveland juke, naked in a column of hot blue light, where the faces thrusting up for her through the veil of smoke had blue light snagged in the whites of their eyes. They wore the expression men always wore when they watched you dance, staring real hard but locked up inside themselves at the same time, so their eyes told you nothing at all and their faces, in spite of the sweat, might have been carved from something that only looked like flesh.
> (Gibson, MLO 21)

She is not important to the men in her audience; it is only her orgone-blue image that matters, because they can manipulate it inside their heads, make it perform as they want, like Riviera does with his Molly Doll in Neuromancer.

> Think of me as a doll. Instead of sticking pins in me, you can stick your thing in me. I'm a magic doll, like a voodoo doll. A doll is a work of art. Art is magic. You make an image of the thing you want to possess or cope with, so you can cope with it. You make a model, so you can have it under control. Dig? Don't you want to possess me?
> (Wilson, Illuminatus! 79)

Mona's situation is very similar to the one John Berger describes in the third chapter of Ways of Seeing:

> One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object--and most particularly an object of vision--a sight.
> (47)

The objectification of Mona extends to even her name--Mona Lisa--which, in a very real sense, is not her own ("she didn't have a last name herself, unless you counted Lisa, and that was more like having two first ones"--Gibson, MLO 51). Rather, it belongs to the image of a woman (the subject of da Vinci's painting) who is, herself, a complete cipher to history. That image in turn is often reduced (metonymized) even further to her smile alone (Michelle Shocked sings on her Captain Swing album, "If she had the chance to do it over again/ It would be a photograph, she would have a wide grin/ But no he was a painter with a longing loving style/ When the paint had dried all that was left was a faint strange smile"--from "Looks Like Mona Lisa"). That smile is what initially links Mona to Angie: "Unconsciously, [Mona] adjusted her expression to approximate Angie's in the poster. Not a grin, exactly. A sort of half-grin, maybe a little sad. Mona felt a special way about Angie. Because--and tricks said it, sometimes--she looked like her" (Gibson, MLO 51).

Mona's resemblance to Angie increases her use-value as a token of exchange between men. Because he has been selling her body all along, Eddy, Mona's pimp, is more than willing to lease her to Prior. She is Eddy's "medium," his gateway to his desire on two levels. The first (and most squalid) is in bed, where Eddy requires Mona to recount a kind of brutal fictional rape narrative for him to

achieve orgasm. "The main thing was that this imaginary trick had treated her like she was a piece of equipment he'd rented for half an hour. . . . And the other thing Eddy needed was for her to tell him how that wasn't what she liked but she'd found herself wanting it anyway, wanting it bad" (Gibson, MLO 24). Once these conditions are fulfilled, Eddy can transport himself into this fantasy (which is likely something Gibson borrowed from the hardboiled thriller genre): "She figured he must be seeing it in his head, like a cartoon, what she was telling him, and at the same time he got to be that faceless pumping big guy" (Gibson, MLO 25). The second manner in which Mona serves as a kind of "medium" for Eddy is that by leasing her to Prior, he thinks he will develop the chance to be taken seriously in the world of criminal high-rollers. "[N]ow that she thought about it, [Mona] couldn't see [Eddy] going for a buy-out bid, because what he wanted most in the whole world was to be part of some big deal. Once he was, he figured, people would start to take him seriously" (Gibson, MLO 121).

Gibson uses prostitution as a metaphor for what happens to Mona on every step of her journey. Her fate is emblematic of the manner in which people with money (usually men) utilize others with less (usually women). One of the most artful of these instances occurs just before Mona undergoes surgery:

> She remembered the old man showing her how you kill a catfish. Catfish has a hole in its skull, covered with skin; you take something stiff and skinny, a wire, even a broomstraw did it, and you just slip it in....
>
> She remembered Cleveland, ordinary kind of day before it was time to get working, sitting up in Lanette's, looking at a magazine. Found this picture of Angie laughing in a restaurant with some other people, everybody pretty but beyond that it was like they had this glow, not really in the photograph but it was there anyway, something d [sic] feel. Look, she said to Lanette, showing her the picture, they got this glow.
>
> It's called money, Lanette said.

> It's called money. You just slip it in.
> (Gibson, MLO 122)

This passage equates prostitution with the killing and consumption of animals as food in the most casual way. The rich people in the photograph are in a restaurant for a reason; they are the ones who do the consuming, and they are the ones who "slip it in." The metaphor appears again when Mona begins to suspect that she might soon be killed:

> Snuff. Lanette had told her about that. How there were men who'd pay to have girls fixed up to look like other people, then kill them. Had to be rich, really rich. Not Prior, but somebody he worked for. Lanette said these guys had girls fixed to look like their wives sometimes. . . . [Lanette] said suits were the weirdest of all, the big suits way up in big companies, because they couldn't afford to lose control when they were working. But when they weren't working, Lanette said, they could afford to lose it any way they wanted.
> (Gibson, MLO 145)

Being SINless may imply a kind of innocence, but it also means that as a marginalized person, Mona can be disposed of in a very perfunctory manner, because she does not officially exist.

Things finally do begin to look up for Mona at the end of the text, but only in comparison to her beginnings. Sense/Net cures her of her addictions and installs her in Angie's place as their chief simstim star (Gibson, MLO 258). While it is true that this is a considerable improvement in lifestyle for Mona, it is an unenviable fate, because simstim is ultimately another form of objectification, a more subtle kind of prostitution. Molly's last words to Mona are, "they'll probably do right by you, or try to" (Gibson, MLO 248); the second half of that sentence should give the reader pause. If things were going to work out perfectly for Mona as a simstim star, it is doubtful that Gibson would have gone to such lengths to illustrate how detrimental being a simstim star was to

Angie's health. Unlike Angie, Mona is too naïve to realize that she is being used, but that does nothing to change the reality of her situation.

Notwithstanding all of the above, Mona is not a complete victim. She does exhibit a kind of resistance to being manipulated that comes, perhaps, from her SINless state. It should be noted that "innocence" is a relative term in Gibson's fictional world; Mona, a prostitute and habitual user of crude stimulants at the age of sixteen, "represents, in Legba's system, the nearest thing to innocence" (Gibson, MLO 239). Being SINless keeps Mona from becoming a drone in some zaibatsu, which the text consistently equates with spiritual and intellectual death. Her resistance is also partly based on escapism through the use of drugs (the title of the book itself is a reference to one such occurrence). "Not that she cared how they looked, when she was in the cage, high and hot and on the beat, three songs into the set and the wiz just starting to peak, new strength in her legs sending her up on the balls of her feet..." (Gibson, MLO 21). However, the text always describes drugs as a temporary solution at best. "Mona felt bad because she knew she'd done something stupid, when she'd thought she was trying to help, but wiz always did that, and how come she couldn't stop doing it?" (Gibson, MLO 247). Mona's real moments of strength come from her insights into the vulnerabilities of those who manipulate and use her:

> Whichever way they wanted it, it got to be a kind of ritual, so it seemed to happen in a place outside your life. And she'd gotten into watching them, when they lost it. That was the interesting part, because they really did lose it, they were totally helpless, maybe just for a split second, but it was like they weren't even there.
> (Gibson, MLO 22)

There are even moments of genuine resistance in the text, moments when Mona becomes indignant about the manner in which she is being treated, and does

something about it.

> Sitting in the bathroom with the cosmetic kit open on her knees, grinding another crystal, she decided she had a right to be pissed off. . . .
>
> She didn't want to be in here by herself, and she'd been scared to ask Prior for a key. He fucking well had one, though, so he could walk in any time with his creep-ass friends. What kind of deal was that?
>
> And the business with the plastic raincoat, that burned her ass too. A disposable fucking plastic raincoat. . . .
>
> She hadn't any plan when she'd gone into the bathroom to take her hit, but as the back of her neck started tingling, she found herself thinking about the streets. . . .
>
> Ten minutes later she was on her way out a side entrance off the main lobby, the wiz singing in her head.
> (Gibson, MLO 76)

These episodes of real action are the exception rather than the rule. Mona is more of a voyeur observing the world than an active participant in it (this particular quality is what later makes her into an excellent simstim star). Although she does not have the power to act on what she sees, she represents the beginning of the inversion of the male subject-female object relationship: the Mona Lisa is now staring back at its viewers.

Kumiko Yanaka, one of the other viewpoint characters in the text, represents another attempt to show Gibson's fictional world through the eyes of an innocent young woman. Her story is of interest because of her largely successful attempts to avoid becoming a marker of considerable value in a male power game. There is also a fair amount of psychodrama involved; Kumi struggles to find her own place in the world, and to walk a thin line between the Law-of-the-Father and the Phallic Mother.

One could not ask for a clearer embodiment of the Name-of-the-Father than Kumiko's father, the head of the Yakuza. The Yakuza, or "the Sons of the Neon Chrysanthemum," as Gibson calls them in "Johnny Mnemonic" (Gibson, BC 4), is one of the most patriarchal of power systems; "Swain's your old man's kobun, or

anyway one of them. Oyabun-kobun, parent-child"--Gibson, MLO 59). His body is inscribed quite literally with signs of his power and privilege: "a tattooed storm of dragons" (Gibson, MLO 2) indicating high rank (Gibson, MLO 28). Gibson also includes more conventional (i.e. Western) signs of male power to solidify the aura of rank surrounding Mr. Yanaka--a Rolex watch and the smell of "whiskey and Dunhill cigarettes" (Gibson, MLO 2).

The visible signs of Mr. Yanaka's power extend to Kumiko as well. As she travels to London in the first class cabin of what is doubtless the future equivalent of a Concorde, she is surrounded by empty seats, "evidence of her father's wealth and power" (Gibson, MLO 1). Molly, who has extensive firsthand knowledge of male invasion of the female body, points out some of the possible physical inscriptions Mr. Yanaka may have made to mark his daughter as his own:

> "You could be kinked, you ever think of that? Maybe your dad, the Yak warlord, he's got a little bug planted in you so he can keep track of his daughter. You got those pretty little teeth, maybe Daddy's dentist tucked a little hardware in there one time when you were into a stim. You go to the dentist?"
> "Yes."
> "You stim while he works?"
> "Yes..."
> "There you go. Maybe he's listening to us right now...."
> Kumiko nearly overturned what was left of her chocolate.
> (Gibson, MLO 58)

Although there is no evidence that Kumiko is bugged in this manner, there are actual physical signs on Kumiko's body of her father's law and culture inscribing itself over the visible traces of her mother's culture. Again, this information emerges from Sally's conversation with Kumiko:

> "Swain says you're half gaijin. Says your mother was Danish."
> She swallowed some of the ale. "You don't look it."
> "She had them change my eyes."
> (Gibson, MLO 29)

Kumiko's mother likely did so to prevent Kumiko from experiencing the cultural conflicts that eventually caused her own death, even if it meant erasing any traces of herself (the idea of a woman who leaves no trace of her passing on the world recurs at the end of the text: "Mona's life has left virtually no trace on the fabric of things"--Gibson, MLO 239).

The body-writing in Gibson's fiction is unusual only in its extreme quality and immediate visibility; Jane Gallop points out in The Daughter's Seduction that it is the nature of the Name-of-the-Father to impose itself on children:

> In Lacan's writing, the Name-of-the-Father is the Law. The legal assignation of a Father's Name to a child is meant to call a halt to uncertainty about the identity of the father. If the mother's femininity (both her sexuality and her untrustworthiness) were affirmed, the Name-of-the-Father would always be in doubt, always be subject to the question of the mother's morality. Thus the Name-of-the-Father must be arbitrarily and absolutely imposed, thereby instituting the reign of patriarchal law.
> (39)

What is most interesting about this quotation in relation to Kumiko's story is that as her father's authority in the Yakuza underworld is called into question by parties unknown, there is a parallel questioning of his authority by Kumiko, based on her uncertainty about whether or not her father was directly responsible for her mother's death. The implication for the plot structure of Mona Lisa Overdrive is that as long as the mother's ghost is "haunting" Kumiko, her father's Name will still be in doubt.

Kumiko's strongest weapon against her father is a symbol of female resistance against the phallic order he represents, "a small cold mask modeled after her dead mother's most characteristic expression" (Gibson, MLO 1)--appropriately enough, in a text that is full of masks, disguises and alter egos. Kumiko adopts this strategy in several situations where she is confronted by an unknown man:

"'You will help me,' She heard herself say, feeling her mother's cold mask click into place" (Gibson, MLO 180); "She was looking into the Dracula's eyes, brown eyes gone wide with an ancient simple terror; the Dracula was seeing her mother's mask" (Gibson, MLO 194). Perhaps this is the mask on the cover of the text--a death mask for the absent mother. Reading the cover in this manner provides an apt summary of the state of the female characters in Gibson's texts. The mask has a positive aspect, as an irruption of the presence of the rebellious mother under patriarchal law, but does nothing to change the fact of the mother's death. Jane Gallop, paraphrasing Luce Irigaray's essay "The 'Mechanics' of Fluids," illustrates both of these aspects when she says, "Discursivity, the reigning system, cannot include woman, because it demands the solid, the identical to the exclusion of the fluid. 'Nonetheless the woman creature, it speaks'" (Daughter's 39).

It would be possible, I suppose, to continue to privilege the position of the dead mother[1] as one who speaks from a space outside the Law, or at least from what Nicole Brossard, in her essay "From Radical to Integral," calls the "Dangerous zone" of "madness, delerium or genius" that exists simultaneously in the realms of Law/"sense" and "non-sense" (Aerial 117). However, as Alice Jardine says, "The Masters do not care at all about what the slaves believe as long as the slaves remain on the exterior of the empire" (Gynesis 44). To uphold this sort of reading would have, I think, the same results as if I had valorized Angela Mitchell as witch/hysteric in the previous chapter.

Championing the mother at the expense of the father is ultimately as destructive as the reverse situation, because the power relationship stays the same--only the names are reversed. Jane Gallop, following Julia Kristeva, speaks of the "phallic mother"--the omniscient, omnipotent (and necessarily absent)

mother who possesses power and authority: the Lacanian phallus (Daughter's 117). "The phallic mother is more dangerous [than the Father] because less obviously phallic. If the phallus 'can only play its role when veiled' (Lacan), then the phallic mother is more phallic precisely by being less obvious" (Gallop, Daughter's 118). 3Jane Tessier-Ashpool's manifestation inside the Aleph in the guise of Kumiko's mother is cyberpunk's equivalent to the phallic mother:

> Her mother's lips were rich and fully glossed, outlined, Kumiko knew, with the finest and narrowest of brushes. She wore her black French jacket, with the dark fur collar framing her smile of welcome. . . .
>
> "You've been a foolish girl, Kumi," her mother said. "Did you imagine I wouldn't remember you, or abandon you to winter London and your father's gangster servants?"
>
> Kumiko watched the perfect lips, open slightly over white teeth; teeth maintained, she knew, by the best dentist in Tokyo. "You are dead," she heard herself say.
>
> "No," her mother replied, smiling, "not now. Not here, in Ueno Park. Look at the cranes, Kumi.". . . .
>
> "Not your mum, understand?" Tick was shaking, his twisted frame quivering as though he forced himself against a terrible wind. "Not... your... mum..." There were dark crescents beneath the arms of the gray suit jacket. His small fists shook as he struggled to take the next step.
>
> "You're ill," Kumiko's mother said, her tone soliticious. "You must lie down."
>
> Tick sank to his knees, forced down by an invisible weight. "Stop it!" Kumiko cried.
>
> Something slammed Tick's face against the pastel concrete of the path.
>
> "Stop it!"
>
> Tick's left arm shot straight out from the shoulder and began to rotate slowly, the hand still balled in a white-knuckled fist. Kumiko heard something give, bone or ligament, and Tick screamed.
>
> Her mother laughed.
>
> Kumiko struck her mother in the face, and pain, sharp and real, jolted through her arm.
>
> Her mother's face flickered, became [illegible] her face. A gaijin face with wide lips and a sharp thin nose.
>
> (Gibson, MLO 221-22)

3Jane is the perfect person to wear the mask of Kumiko's mother, because her situation as a marginalized woman in a state of limbo is analogous to Kumi's

mother's ghostly presence in the text. 3Jane is trapped in the aleph, a marginal space separated not only from the real ("meat") world, but also from cyberspace. As the episode where she impersonates Kumi's mother shows, 3Jane is far from powerless inside her creation... but there is the crux of the matter. The Masters do not care what the slaves believe as long as the slaves remain on the exterior of the empire. Perhaps 3Jane's situation can serve as a kind of parable for the perils of a separatist feminism. At the risk of quoting Nicole Brossard out of context, I am going to return briefly to her essay "From Radical to Integral," because of the parallel between 3Jane's situation and a strategy Brossard suggests for the collecting of women's energies through writing:

> 2. Producing a void, a mental space which, little by little, will become invested with our subjectivities, thus constituting an imaginary territory, where our energies will begin to take form.
> (111)

Brossard goes on to warn that "This stage of exploding sense is, in some ways, crucial: in fact it is at this stage that everything could either culminate in a straitjacket or be put to use in creative work" (111). It seems that 3Jane's program has ended in that very straitjacket.

But back to Kumiko: striking out at 3Jane, who is disguised as her (phallic) mother, resolves the psychodrama. She has negotiated her way past the perils of both the Father and Mother by taking Sally's advice: "Start being your own" (Gibson, MLO 32). When confronted by her father over the video-telephone, Kumi is unable to resort to her usual defense: "In reflex, she summoned her mother's mask of disdain, but it would not come" (Gibson, MLO 242). And, as predicted, her father's problems resolve themselves at the same instant her mother's ghost is laid to rest.

> "And your difficulties, Father?"
> Was there a flicker of a smile? "All that is ended. Order

and accord are again established."
(Gibson, MLO 242)

Shortly thereafter, we then learn that her father was not directly responsible for the death of his wife, and, in fact, feels great remorse over her death.

> "Father," Kumiko said, "on the night of my mother's death, did your order the secretaries to leave her alone?"
>
> Her father's face was very still. She watched it fill with a sorrow she had never before seen. "No," he said at last, "I did not."
> (Gibson, MLO 243)

The last time Kumiko appears in the text, there is a very neat summary of the whole situation, and a happy ending, complete with a moral:

> Somehow, she thought, her meeting with 3Jane had freed her of her shame, and her father's answer of her anger. 3Jane had been very cruel. Now she saw her mother's cruelty as well. But all must be forgiven, one day, she thought, and fell asleep on the way to a place called Camden Town.
> (Gibson, MLO 256)

Some aspects of the conclusion to Kumiko's story are unsatisfactory, because that conclusion is far too neat. There remains the matter of the fairytales Kumiko's mother told her:

> There were princesses in the stories as well, and ballerinas, and each of them, Kumiko had known, was in some way her mother.
>
> The princess-ballerinas were beautiful but poor, dancing for love in the far city's heart, where they were courted by artists and student poets, handsome and penniless. In order to support an aged parent, or purchase an organ for an ailing brother, a princess-ballerina was sometimes obliged to voyage very far indeed, perhaps as far as Tokyo, to dance for money. Dancing for money, the tales implied, was not a happy thing.
> (Gibson, MLO 59)

Whether or not her mother was a cruel person, in this passage she is cast in the familar role as medium of exchange in a male culture, married to Mr. Yanaka as some part of a business transaction. There is nothing in the text that states whether or not her cruelty was present before her marriage.

While Kumiko's father was perhaps not directly responsible for the death of his wife, and even tried to find a cure for her madness, his attempts have the invasive feel of gynesis about them:

> He had brought doctors from Denmark, from Australia, and finally from Chiba. The doctors had listened to the dreams of the princess-ballerina, had mapped and timed her synapses and drawn samples of her blood. The princess-ballerina had refused their drugs, their delicate surgeries. "They want to cut my brain with lasers," she had whispered to Kumiko.
> (Gibson, MLO 204)

Here is (male) technology (technē) attempting to quantify and diagram the body of a woman (physis) in order to locate that which is beyond reason--her madness--and to cut it out, or to inscribe another pattern over it. These attempted "cures" are aimed at producing conformity, not at understanding difference and/or making the concessions necessary to interact with it.

Given the restrictive nature of the role women play in many Japanese domestic relationships, it is not difficult to understand why Kumiko's mother did commit suicide. William Bohnaker, a freelance writer and writing instructor who has lived in Japan, presents a scenario that he feels is typical of gaijin women married to Japanese sarari-men in his book The Hollow Doll[2]:

> You know what he is thinking, your boss, sitting there, brooding about your wife. It has become known she is having a difficult time adapting to Japanese life. One proof of this is her belief that for women there is no Japanese life. A second proof is that she has stated this belief. A third is her stating this publicly. There are many more proofs, demonstrated in her agitation, her anger, her loudness, but they are too shameful to speak of, directly. Gaijin women seem so demanding, so self-indulgent, so... uncalm. As her husband it is your responsibility to calm her. "Be stable!" he exhorts you. Be a unicorn, you tell yourself as futilely. "You must make her understand that she now must live as a Japanese!"
> (22)

Even if such attempts to conform to the enormously restrictive roles available to Japanese wives were made by a Westerner, Bohnaker is convinced that she would

remain forever gaijin. "[E]ven more defeating than restricting is the knowledge that eventually dawns upon the Westerner that even were [s]he to master the maze of the Japanese social psyche, [s]he would never be accepted as one of them by the people born into it" (Bohnaker 202)[3]. The pressure to conform, combined with the very impossibility of that action, creates a hopeless situation for Kumi's mother:

> Her mother's madness. Her father would not refer to it. Madness had no place in her father's world, though suicide did. Her mother's madness was European, an imported snare of sorrow and delusion...."
> (Gibson, MLO 203)

Her suicide is no real escape, not only because it is a concession to Japanese society, but also because that society will nevertheless condemn her action. "A mother who kills herself and leaves her young children behind is often reviled as an oni, a 'fiend'" (Bohnaker 178). "'That's some catch, that Catch-22,' he observed" (Heller 47).

The two other characters from Mona Lisa Overdrive that I am going to discuss in detail are both present in Gibson's other texts: Angela Mitchell and Molly Millions (who goes by the name "Sally Shears" for the first part of this text, but is immediately recognizable by her mirrorshades[4]). I will leave a discussion of the former, perhaps the most victimized of Gibson's characters, for last, because her fate problematizes the conclusion of the entire triptych.

Gibson has taken pains with Molly's character in this book. It would have been very easy to simply reprise her role from Neuromancer as a female Schwarzenegger stand-in, but he has taken the time to develop her character, providing plausible developments in her character, and more insight into her motives than in her previous appearances[5]. She has progressed from being described as "street samurai," a "working girl," (Gibson, Nm 30) to "a

businesswoman" (Gibson, MLO 57), "a backer, providing funds for various kinds of business operations" with "a share in some German casino" (Gibson, MLO 139). Molly is still the most dynamic of Gibson's characters. Although allegedly "retired" like Case and Turner, she finds herself unable to stay that way. "[I]t's sort of on again, off again" (Gibson, MLO 30), she tells Tick (quite an understatement, considering her "hobby" of fighting for cash in illegal bloodsport matches--Gibson, MLO 140).

Various experiences have left their marks on her flesh in both conventional and unconventional ways. "[L]ines of tension and fatigue around her mouth" (Gibson, MLO 56) remind the reader that she is fourteen years older than her last appearance; some of her more unorthodox activities have left more telling indications.

> She pulled her black sweater over her head. Her breasts were small, with brownish nipples; a scar, running from just below the left nipple, vanished into the waistband of her jeans.
> "You were hurt," Kumiko said, looking at the scar.
> Sally looked down. "Yeah."
> "Why didn't you have it removed?"
> "Sometimes it's good to remember."
> "Being hurt?"
> "Being stupid."
> (Gibson, MLO 133)

(Molly's view of body inscriptions is rather Nietzchean in this respect: "Pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics"--Nietzche, in Grosz 4). This scar is a remainder from her prizefighting days: "Burmese kid opened you right up, living color" (Gibson, MLO 140). It is perhaps inconsistent that Sally would engage in such a practice, because, as violence packaged for voyeuristic titillation and profit, it is not all that different from the prostitution in which she was once involved.

There is also a more subtle change to her body and behavior, a change that may be a result of the prizefighting incident. At no point in Mona Lisa Overdrive does Molly unsheathe the famous razorblades beneath her fingernails (She is tempted to do so at one point, but it isn't immediately obvious[6]). Gibson utilizes a very subtle body cue to indicate the violent possibility of the use of those nails. At the start of Mona Lisa Overdrive, Molly's nails, "evidently acrylic, were the shade and sheen of mother-of-pearl" (Gibson, MLO 29), a sign of sophistication, and of a more sedentary lifestyle than her earlier days, when those nails were burgundy (Gibson, BC 8; Nm 25) to match her leather jeans, "the color of dried blood" (Gibson, BC 6). When Molly explodes into violent action in chapter 27 of Mona Lisa ("Bad Lady"), those nails revert to their previous color. "And where'd she get that nail color, that burgundy? Mona didn't think they even made that anymore" (Gibson, MLO 168).

In terms of actual character development, the most interesting change between Molly's role in Neuromancer and Mona Lisa is that the gynesis present in the earlier book that limited her potential is now absent. There is no one looking through her eyes, feeling through her body, or paying her to do his work; her actions are largely her own. I should probably state here that I am not condemning Gibson's earlier books for not possessing "round" characters, because they were not intended to be read as mimetic realist novels. Neither was Mona Lisa Overdrive; it is far too fragmented to be read in such a manner. However, unlike the earlier books, where the emphasis is on the development of the fictional world, I think the intent in Mona Lisa is to present a rapid series of frames focusing on the characters. Therefore, the presentation of each of those characters--especially Molly, because she is so central to the three books--has to be as detailed as possible[7].

Gibson employs several strategies to "flesh out" the portrait of Molly in Mona Lisa. The most common of these is viewing her through the eyes of the text's young innocents, Mona and Kumi. Although they both tend to romanticize her, there are several moments in the text that call into question the romantic hero status Molly takes on so easily.

> As Kumiko listened to Sally condense fourteen years of personal history for the Finn's benefit, she found herself imagining this younger Sally as a bishonen hero in a traditional romantic video; fey, elegant, and deadly. While she found Sally's matter-of-fact account of her life difficult to follow, with its references to places and things she didn't know, it was easy to imagine her winning the sudden, flick-of-the-wrist victories expected of bishonen. But no, she thought, as Sally dismissed "a bad year in Hamburg," sudden anger in her voice--an old anger, the year a decade past--it was a mistake to cast this woman in Japanese terms. There were no ronin, no wandering samurai; Sally and the Finn were talking business. (Gibson, MLO 139)

But later, on the same page there is the following sentence: "Perhaps, Kumiko decided, Sally had once been something along ronin lines, a kind of samurai" (Gibson, MLO 139). This vacillation allows Gibson to add both romantic and grittily anti-romantic elements to Molly's character; the tension between those two aspects creates depth. The two elements fuse perfectly at the end of the text, when Molly walks off into the desert (sunset, probably), in a scene stolen straight from Kurosawa's Yojimbo, or one of the numerous Clint Eastwood westerns it inspired:

> When he'd gotten it all together, he handed the control unit to the woman.
> "Guess we wait for you now."
> "No," she said. "You go to Cleveland. Cherry just told you."
> "What about you?"
> "I'm going for a walk."
> "You wanna freeze? Maybe wanna starve?"
> "Wanna be by my fucking self for a change." She tried the controls and the Judge trembled, took a step forward, another. "Good luck in Cleveland." They watched her walk out across the Solitude, the Judge clumping along behind her. Then she turned

and yelled back, "Hey Cherry! Get that guy to take a bath!"
(Gibson, MLO 254)

Molly's pity for 3Jane (and the others in the aleph) is another touch that helps to make her less of a caricature and more of a character. As someone who realizes the true value of one's body, it is appropriate that she shows compassion for the disembodied, and does her best to preserve what little time they may have left. However, I am going to discuss that issue further at the end of this chapter, and need to say something about Angela Mitchell first.

Angela Mitchell is perhaps the least fortunate of all the characters in Mona Lisa Overdrive, Kumiko's mother included. She continues the downward slide that she began in Count Zero (seven years earlier) toward total annihilation. Two factors are the major contributors to her fate--her status as a simstim star, and the vévés in her head--because they have to do with her being marked as an object with high use-value.

One of the most disconcerting results of Angie's immense fame as the globe's most popular simstim star is that she loses her autonomy, because she, like Mona in the blue light cage, is more important as an image than as a person. Gibson describes a situation where Angie's handlers have a "talking head" of Angie give a publicity statement of which she is completely unaware:

> "Hilton had Continuity front a head for you today," Ng told her, as she waited.
> "Oh?"
> "Public statement on your decision to go to Jamaica, praise for the methods of the clinic, the dangers of drugs, renewed enthusiasm for your work, gratitude to your audience, stock footage of the Malibu place..."
> Continuity could generate video images of Angie, animate them with templates compiled from her stims. Viewing them induced a mild but not unpleasant vertigo, one of the rare times she was directly able to grasp the fact of her fame.
> (Gibson, MLO 84)

The talking head is not a new idea; it has been used before in science fiction

(the best known example being Max Headroom), and is under development for actual use at institutions like MIT's Media Lab. Science fiction writer Michael Crichton's movie Looker describes a situation very close to the one in Gibson's fiction: a woman's image is digitized by a computer, and, because she as a person is then superfluous, the network eventually tries to dispose of her. What is of particular interest here is that the creation of both the factual and fictional versions of the talking head involve an actual physical mapping out of the person-to-be-objectified's body. "The actress was painted with a grid of lines and then photographed. The grid lines were traced into the computer, and then used as a guide to construct a polygon mesh. The mesh was then rendered using conventional polygon techniques, including smooth shading" (Rivlin, qtd. in Kleiner 148). The result of this process is a totally controllable female image, which is, of course, exactly what is at issue in gynesis. Alice Jardine invokes H.D.'s Helen In Egypt when she asks "must we be careful that, like Helen, we are not left in Egypt with only an image of ourselves transported to Troy as a pretext for war?" (Gynesis 40).

It seems that in Gibson's fiction, the pressure of being a media megastar is too great for an individual to bear. Angie's manner of dealing with that pressure is to distinguish the part of her that is a function of her fame (the part she calls "Angie Mitchell") from her "real" self. She tells Poryphre in chapter 30, "The Rip," that Bobby was what held the two pieces of her life together:

> And [Bobby] was there, right there, the very first night. Later, when Legba--when I was with the Net..."
>
> "When you were becoming Angie."
>
> "Yes. And as much of me as that took, I knew he'd be there. And also that he'd never buy it, entirely, and I needed that, how it was still just a scam, to him, the whole business...."
>
> "The Net?"
>
> "Angie Mitchell. He knew the difference between it and me."

"Did he?"
"Maybe he was the difference."
(Gibson 184)

It is that part of her, the "Angie Mitchell" part, that Mona will later inherit. Because that portion is the one that bears her name, there is very little "me" left with it gone, and Angie joins Mona and Kumiko's mother as another woman whose "me" has left little trace on the face of things.

It wouldn't be the worst of possible fates to be able to spend one's time in a leisurely fashion while various simulacra of oneself were out earning a living. However, the images of Angie that the AI Continuity generates are not a substitute for her, they are a supplement (the demands of the public are literally too great, physically and psychologically). Gynesis: more of everything is demanded of Angie by a public that lives its desires vicariously through her flesh. Therefore, to counter the flood of information from her technologically amplified senses, she begins taking "the drug."

"It was just like being here, being there, only you didn't have to--"
"Feel it as much?"
"Yes."
(Gibson, MLO 44)

Even this attempt at escape conceals another instance of gynesis at work. The drug is a writing instrument that partially erases and re-inscribes the vévés in her head according to the wishes of Continuity:

"No two lots were identical. The only constant was the substance whose psychotropic signature you regarded as 'the drug.' In the course of ingestion, many other substances were involved, as well as several dozen subcellular nanomechanisms, programmed to restructure the synaptic alterations effected by Christopher Mitchell...."
Your father's vévés are altered, partially erased, redrawn....
(Gibson, MLO 215-16)

The motives of the AI for this action are something of a mystery. The loa Maman

Brigitte tells Angie that "Continuity's motives are closed to me. A different order" (Gibson, MLO 216). We also know, though, about a different kind of writing Continuity was doing:

> Continuity was writing a book. Robin Lanier had told [Angie] about it. It wasn't like that, he'd said. It looped back into itself and constantly mutated; Continuity was always writing it. She asked why. But Robin had already lost interest: because Continuity was an AI, and AIs did things like that. (Gibson, MLO 42-43)

"This text is outside pleasure, outside criticism, unless it is reached through another text of bliss: you cannot speak 'on' such a text, you can only speak 'in' it, in its fashion" (Barthes 22). To Continuity, Angie may well be part of this text-of-pleasure, written for amusement by a nonhuman intelligence. Perhaps Continuity is attempting to "know" flesh (the impossible "other" for the machine[8]) in the same way Gibson's male heroes are attempting to "know" cyberspace... through the figure of "woman" (Angie).

When the loa return, speaking once again through Angie, the pain she feels as a medium is explicit: "And it hurt Angie when they spoke, made her muscles knot and her nose bleed, while Mona crouched over her and dabbed away the blood, filled with a weird mixture of fear and love and pity for the queen of all her dreams" (Gibson, MLO 231). As she did for Turner in Count Zero, Angie serves as a map for Molly (who seems to have honorary male status at times[9]). "The first voice had come when they'd been driving south, after Molly'd brought Angie in the copter. That one had just hissed and croaked and said something over and over, about New Jersey and numbers on a map" (Gibson, MLO 232); "Mona understood that Angie was telling [Molly] which way to go, or anyway those voices were telling her" (Gibson, MLO 233). At the text's climax, Angie is connected (by virtue of the vévés) to so many second parties with vested interests in her

body that she no longer has her own distinguishable point of view, or control over what she sees: "Angela Mitchell comprehends this room and its inhabitants through shifting data planes that represent viewpoints, though of whom or what, she is in most cases in doubt. There is a considerable degree of overlap, of contradiction" (Gibson, MLO 238). The sensory overload that, in a sense, is the equivalent of a total fragmentation of her self (and the pain that accompanies that overload), only ceases at the moment of her withdrawal from her flesh.

We already know why Angie started taking the drug; without Bobby, she was unable to maintain the distance from her work necessary to keep her personality from fragmenting. But what about Bobby? How does he cope without Angie? The following excerpt is from Slick Henry's conversation with Bobby in the aleph[10]:

> "Listen," he said. From the open door came the sound of tires over gravel. "Know who that is, Slick? That's Angela Mitchell."
>
> Slick turned. Bobby the Count was looking out at the drive.
>
> "Angie Mitchell? The stim star? She's in this thing too?"
>
> "In a manner of speaking, Slick, in a manner of speaking..."
>
> (Gibson, MLO 151)

Angie herself is not in the Aleph at this point; Bobby is referring to a simulacrum of her that is part of the portable universe he is inhabiting. Gynesis: All Bobby needs is Angie's image to be happy, not the "me," the real person. What is really important to him is his quest for "what brought the Change" (Gibson, MLO 191).

The concepts of "When It Changed" and "The Shape" are crucial to a discussion of gynesis in Gibson's fiction. The two are ideas are related ("'Before [It Changed],' Gentry said, 'it didn't have a Shape'"--Gibson, MLO 191); together, they form the fictional equivalent of what Jardine calls "the state of crisis endemic to modernity... [the] loss, or at least a breakdown, of narrative"

(Gynesis 68). "Gentry was convinced that cyberspace had a Shape, an overall total form. Not that this was the weirdest idea Slick had ever run across, but Gentry had this obsessive conviction that the Shape mattered totally. The apprehension of the Shape was Gentry's grail[11]" (Gibson, MLO 63). Gentry's search for the Shape seems to me to be the same process I was describing at the opening of this chapter: the exploration of the void behind the chrome mask, the search for the Shape/figure of cyberspace. The Shape is just another name for the gynema of these books, the cyber-god that is the sum total of the matrix. In summation of Lyotard, Jardine says, "Like literature, philosophy will have to put aside its fear of moving beyond what is merely human and male (the visage); it must accelerate its search for Eurydice, for what is female, for the figure, if it wishes to invent new songs" (Gynesis 77).

Bobby and Gentry are analogous to the male philosphers and writers who are attempting to negotiate that crisis in the "real" world by putting "woman" into discourse ("'Woman,' 'the feminine,' and so on have come to signify those processes that disrupt symbolic structures in the West"--Jardine, Gynesis 42). They are looking for the same thing; only they use different words to describe it. "'You're looking for something, but there's nobody to steal it from. I'm looking for it too" (Gibson, MLO 191), says Gentry to Bobby. Noone to steal it from? How about the women who devised it, who all seem to die as direct or indirect results of the men who wish to appropriate their creations? The reason I say this is not only because the Shape is the product of a woman's imaginary[12], but also because two women are central to its discovery: Angie, and 3Jane Tessier-Ashpool.

3Jane is like Rikki in "Burning Chrome," Linda Lee in Neuromancer, and Angie in Gibson's other two novels in that she serves as a locus for a male artist's

attempt to define some sort of futurity. In Mona Lisa Overdrive, Angie watches a documentary about the Tessier-Ashpools called "Antartica Starts Here," made by a Hans Becker. Chapter 16, "Filament in Strata," is filled with images of gynesis, as Becker focuses first on Marie-France Tessier, then on her daughter 3Jane:

> Yes, you captured them. The journey out, the building of walls, the long spiral in. They were about walls, weren't they? The labyrinth of blood, of family. The maze hung against the void, saying, We are that within, that without is other, here forever shall we dwell. And the darkness was there from the beginning.... You found it repeatedly in the eyes of Marie-France, pinned it in a slow zoom against the shadowed orbits of the skull. Early on she ceased to allow her image to be recorded. You worked with what you had. You justified her image, rotated her through planes of light, planes of shadow, generated models, mapped her skull in grids of neon. You used special programs to age her images according to statistical models, animation systems to bring your mature Marie-France to life. You reduced her image to a vast but finite number of points and stirred them, let new forms emerge, chose those that seemed to speak to you.... And then you went on to the others, to Ashpool and the daughter whose face frames your work, [i.e. 3Jane] its first and final image. (Gibson, MLO 102-03)

Becker's construction of an elaborate map of Marie-France's body, and manipulation of the resultant image, is another instance of the talking head image, and another instance of gynesis at work. It is not unfeasible to read Marie-France's refusal to be recorded as an attempt to resist being objectified and incorporated into the canon of male art about women that John Burger describes in Ways of Seeing. If this was the case, she of course failed; technology--technē--(in the hands of its master) has overcome physis.

The image of the male artist finding his way to some intangible through a woman, or the image of a woman, intensifies when the documentary focuses on 3Jane. "3Jane was the filament, Tessier-Ashpool the strata. . . . The critics

agreed: 3Jane was Becker's trigger. . . . 3Jane became the focus, a seam of perverse gold through the granite of the family" (Gibson, MLO 106). 3Jane is important as a locus for gynesis not only to Hans Becker, but also to Bobby and Gentry. 3Jane created the aleph ("'Blew her family fortune to build this thing'"--Gibson, MLO 191), and without it, he would never have found the Shape. "'Macrocosm, microcosm. We carried an entire universe across a bridge tonight, and that which is above is like that below. . . .And now,' he said, 'we'll see the shape of the little universe our guest's gone voyaging in. And in that form, Slick Henry, I'll see..." (Gibson, MLO 90)[13]. The aleph is a product of 3Jane's imagination in the same manner that the god of cyberspace (Neuromancer-Wintermute) was of her mother's. In a situation that is analogous to 3Jane's father's murder of his wife to make use of her AI creations, Bobby invades and colonizes the imaginary space inside the aleph with little regard for 3Jane's wishes:

> "She hates my guts. See, I stole it, her soul-catcher. She had her construct in place in here when I took off for Mexico, so she's always been around. Thing was, she died. Outside, I mean. Meanwhile, all her shit outside, all her scams and schemes, that's being run by lawyers, programs, more flunkies...." He grinned. "It really pisses her off. The people who're trying to get into your place to get the aleph back, they work for somebody else who works for some people she hired out on the Coast. But yeah, I've done the odd deal with her, traded things. She's crazy, but she plays a tight game...."
> (Gibson, MLO 191)

The difference betwen the two situations is that because 3Jane, the chief villain of Mona Lisa Overdrive, has designs on Angela Mitchell (ever the victim), Bobby feels justified in his actions. But the question here is the same one that arose when considering Mr. Yanaka's culpability for the death of his wife. To what extent did Bobby's theft of the aleph precipitate 3Jane's attempts

at revenge?

There is another, much larger question that the presence of the aleph poses; it has to do with Samuel R. Delany's statement in his essay "About 5,750 Words" that "virtually all of the classics of speculative fiction are mystical" (34). That is, most of the best SF texts (and I would locate all of Gibson's books among their number) end on a transcendent note, said transcendence being "generated from the tension between suicide and immortality" (Delany 35). When discussing Alfred Bester's The Stars My Destination, Delany speaks of the transcendent moment in the text as "a very powerful dramatization of Rimbaud's theory of the systematic derangement of the senses to achieve the unknown" (35). I suppose the confusion of perspective Angela Mitchell experiences just before her death could be read as a comparable instance. However, I am going to take issue with the thesis that there is a true transcendent moment in Mona Lisa Overdrive. I believe--for a number of reasons, which I will outline below--that, although there is the appearance of such a moment in the text, it is in actuality an illusion, and one of the most ironic moments in all of Gibson's writing.

What is at issue is the question of whether or not the "downloading" of 3Jane, Bobby and Angie into the aleph represents a true instance of transcendence. Surrounding that question is a very large tangle of paradoxes and unknown factors, and it seems that whether or not any one person accepts the validity of that transcendence depends on which side of the mind/body binary they champion. The two sides of the debate are defined by Dr. Hans Moravec in his book Mind Children:

> Body-identity assumes that a person is defined by the stuff of which a human body is made. Only by maintaining the continuity of body stuff can we preserve an individual person. Pattern-identity, conversely, defines the essence of a person,

> say myself, as the pattern and the process going on in my head and body, not the machinery supporting that process. If the process is preserved, I am preserved. The rest is mere jelly. (117)

Moravec is one of the better known champion of the "mind"/pattern-identity side of the debate; his book details various strategies for humanity's future evolution into machines. Jeanne Carstensen and Richard Kadrey say in their introduction to Whole Earth Review 63 (which focuses on the question, "Is the Body Obsolete?", and is an excellent general introduction to the current players in this age-old debate) that "Moravec is hardly the first scientist to propose this idea [downloading]. He is, however, perhaps the first with the expertise, the vision, the time, and the resources to make it happen" (2). Moravec actually does describe an situation analogous to Gibson's aleph in his book: "Wholesale resurrection may be possible through the use of immense simulators. . . . According to the pattern-identity position, such simulated people would be as real as you or me, though imprisoned in the simulator" (123)[14].

Sol Yurick makes two suggestions in Metatron about why the idea of downloading proceeds so naturally from the Western (dualist) philosophical condition. The first is that the binary design of the computer itself makes the machine an ideal repository for the mind of a dualist[15]: "The original choices for computers, binary, Boolean (Leibnizian, as Wiener would have it) logic, reflected a dialectical, even a Manichean approach and was an unfortunate decision. Why these choices? It was easier to design electrical circuits that could carry out the logic operations" (18). His second suggestion is that the dualistic paradigm (and gynesis, although he does not use the word) is a result of the homosexuality of the Athenian philosphers who were its originators.

> [D]oes it mean anything at all that the great themes sounded by the Athenian playwrights and philosophers, and upon which the great symphony of western thought is composed, were all

> homosexuals, but nevertheless required to mate with women and replicate? Is there a hidden content, a secret sexual message in philosophy, a movement toward body-purified thought? This has bearing on the question of heterosexual reproduction, the desire to escape the tyranny of Grand Design-serving matings. A homosexual population generally doesn't replicate; it must recruit. Will it put artificial reproduction on the agenda? Do dreams of non-heterosexual reproduction lead to designs for immortality and eternal youth... a longing for transcendance [sic], a covert desire to escape the decayable body? (Yurick 105-06)[16]

Yurick goes on to cite two examples of gynesis from key works in the canon of Western literature, The Divine Comedy and Faust: "Faust turns his back on earthly marriage and love, to mate with a 'female' principle in heaven, seeking and using knowledge and deeds in his journey. Dante glimpses Paradiso, seeing shining intelligence and bodiless love" (106). The implication is exactly what Jardine suggests: that gynesis proceeds from the binary structure of Western thought, and that it represents Man's desire to get out of his present (bodily) dilemma.

Given the binary nature of the structure of Western thought, it is not surprising that the chief champions of downloading (and Jardine's technē) are male, and that its opponents, the champions of the body (physis) are mostly women. Playing foursquare to Moravec's position in WER 63 is feminist-spiritualist Starhawk:

> The essential question here is one of value. To consider the body something we can transcend implies that it has no inherent value, that it exists only as a vehicle for something else. This is a concept not new in Western culture--at times, the body was seen simply as a rather tainted vehicle of the soul; at other times, as a clumsy vehicle of reason. Now we seem to be viewing the body as an imperfect machine.
>
> All these views imply a split between body and something else, in which the body comes out lower, less important, something to be done away with. By extension, women, whose bodies bring new bodies into being, are also seen as lesser and tainted. And the earth-body is itself seen as something to be transcended, used for what can be extracted, and then discarded.[17]

> Rather than trying to transcend the body, we'd do better to ask how we can heal this split in consciousness, and preserve and restore the living , organismic functions of the earth. Because this split has brought us to a situation in which organic life on earth is threatened on all counts. (35)

I think Starhawk is correct in stating that this is a values issue. If downloading is ever going to be possible, it will not be any time soon. What needs to be dealt with is the destructive mindset of its champions. Gibson seems to agree as well:

> As for that downloading stuff, I think those guys who seriously consider that stuff are crazier than a sackful of rats. I think that's monstrous! It just seems so obvious to me, but people like those guys at Autodesk who're building cyberspace--I can't believe it: they've almost got it--they just don't understand. My hunch is that what I was doing was trying to come up with some kind of metaphor that would express my deepest ambivalence about media in the twentieth century. And it was my satisfaction that I sort of managed to do it, and then these boff-its come in and say "God damn, that's a good idea! Let's plug it all in!" But, you know, it just leaves me thinking, "What??" You know, that is actually stranger than having people do theses about your work, is to have people build this demented shit that you dreamed up, when you were trying to make some sort of point about industrial society. It's just a strange thing. (Wershler-Henry, "Queen" 30)

This mindset--the one that actively chases its ultra-high tech vision of a fleshless future--is closely tied to gynesis. In fact, gynesis is the literary/philosophic manifestation of that mindset; Bobby Quine, Case, Josef Virek, and Bobby Newmark represent Gibson's attempts to re-create and comment on it in his fiction. My difficulty with Gibson's social satire is that while he satirizes some aspects of the high-tech mindset very effectively--like the multinational corporations, and the people who run them--he sometimes overlooks the implications of his male characters' actions for the female characters.

When/if downloading does become a possibility, it will be at the expense of those on the "dark" side of the binary--women and other disadvantaged groups (remember Linda Lee, Angie, 3Jane and Marie-France). Stephanie Mills presents an ironic caveat in her contribution to the debate on bodily obsolescence:

> When you hear all the lofty civic talk about "Us" directing evolution, bear in mind that "Us" is the tall white guys with good teeth, the same crowd that for centuries has been dependent on the physical labor of wives, slaves, children, or laborers, proxy bodies regarded as being more dispensable than those of the father classes. An awful lot of overreaching was accomplished by these suffering proxies--cannon-fodder borne, looms tended, coal mined, rails laid, and towers flung up.
> (45)

Sol Yurick echoes this sentiment: "[I]n the meantime, on the peasant land (what's left of it), in the jungles (what's left of those), in the world's ghettoes (which proliferate), in the poisoned seas, rivers, and lakes, the contaminated land, sky and earth, a lot of humans must be phased out" (15). Gibson never mentions how many lives it took to construct the follies of the Tessier-Ashpools or of Josef Virek, but the implication is always there. Thus, the "immortality" that the aleph offers, or that Virek attempted to achieve, would not be available to the bulk of the population--women, children, and other minorities--even if they wanted it (a moot point at best).

The problems with the aleph do not end with the unattractiveness or general inaccessibility of its own brand of immortality. There is still the problem of the three people (3Jane, Bobby, and Angie) and the construct (the Finn) and the AI (Colin) inside it. Have they achieved transcendence? My opinion on the answer to that question is derived partly from evidence within Mona Lisa Overdrive, partly from comments Gibson has made, and partly from the treatment of the subject by other writers, particularly Stanisław Lem.

Douglas Hofstadter and Daniel C. Dennett's collection, The Mind's I: Fantasies and Reflections on Self and Soul, contains an excerpt from Lem's classic SF text, The Cyberiad, called "The Princess Ineffabelle."[18] It concerns a king named Zipperupus who is sampling dreams from a machine invented by the Lord High Thaumaturge, a magician/scientist named Subtillion. In one of these dreams, the king reads of a princess named Ineffabelle, who lived five centuries before his time. He falls madly in love with her, and searches all over the dream for her, until he meets "an individual of patriarchal appearance," who offers "to let thee see her--not in the flesh, forsooth, but a fair informational facsimile, a model that is digital, not physical, stochastic, not plastic, ergodic and most assuredly erotic, and all in yon Black Box, which I constructed in my spare time out of odds and ends!" (Lem, "Princess" 97). The patriarch informs the king that he cannot attain the object of his desire as a being of matter, but must be translated into what is essentially one of Moravec's "patterns."

> "If such is thy unalterable desire, there is a way I can connect thee to the Princess Ineffabelle, but first thou must part with thy present form, for I shall take thy appurtenant coordinates and make a program of thee, atom by atom, and place thy simulation in that world medievally modeled, informational and representational, and there it will remain, enduring as long as electrons course through these wires and hop from cathode to anode [emphasis added]. But thou, standing here before me now, thou wilt be annihilated so that thy only existence may be in the form of given fields and potentials, statistical, heuristical, and wholly digital!"
> (Lem, "Princess" 97-98)

This is not the end of the story, but it contains the segment (emphasized) that is most relevant to my discussion of Gibson's aleph. I believe that the characters in Gibson's aleph do not achieve a real transcendence for the simple reason that the aleph is about to run out of power. As soon as it does, that is

the end of their consciousnesses (permanently, if the aleph works like computer RAM, or temporarily, until power is restored, if it works like ROM). It really doesn't matter whether or not the versions of 3Jane, Bobby, and Angie in the aleph are only close approximations if they are soon going to be destroyed.

There is both textual and authorial evidence for this reading. Consider the scene in chapter 43, "Judge," where Molly is preparing to head off into the desert. She asks Slick Henry to do some quick hardware hacking for her:

> "There'll be an emergency kit in here, somewhere. Get it, get up on the roof, get me the solar cells and some wire. I want you to rig the cells so they'll recharge this thing's battery. Can you do that?"
>
> "Probably. Why?"
>
> "She sank back in the seat and Slick saw that she was older than he'd thought, and tired. "Mitchell's in there now. They want her to have some time, is all...."
>
> "They?"
>
> "I dunno. Something. Whatever I cut my deal with. How long you figure the battery'll hold out, if the cells work?"
>
> "Couple months. Year, maybe."
>
> "Okay. I'll hide it somewhere, where the cells can get the sun."
>
> "What happens if you just cut the power?"
>
> She reached down and ran the tip of her index finger along the thin cable that connected the aleph to the battery. Slick saw her fingernails in the morning light; they looked artificial. "Hey 3Jane," she said, her finger poised above the cable, "I gotcha." Then her hand was a fist, which opened, as though she were letting something go.
>
> (Gibson, MLO 253)

This passage contains a considerable amount of evidence suggesting that the time remaining to the inhabitants of the aleph is extremely limited: a couple of months, or a year at most, if the battery holds out, if the power isn't cut off by an outside source, if the solar cells work properly.... Further, there is no textual evidence that would lead me to conclude that the aleph functions in anything other than "real time;" if time were slower inside, or could be modulated, then there might be a case for a genuine instance of transcendence.

One would think that if the loa wanted Angie and Bobby to have more time together (out of the AI equivalent of a sense of guilt for having used her so badly, presumably), they could have found a less precarious method for doing so.

When reading from his work-in-progress, The Difference Engine, at ConText '89 in Edmonton, Gibson was asked about the ending of Mona Lisa Overdrive by a member of the audience. What he had to say provides considerable damning evidence against the case for a transcendent moment at the end of the text:

> Q: Do you have plans to continue beyond Mona Lisa Overdrive, or is that it?
>
> Gibson: No, that's a wrap. You know, in a way, I like Mona Lisa Overdrive, but it's almost one too many. Like the fragments... the fabric started to give. It's like trying to upholster a couch with not quite enough material. Anyway, it's not [Roger Zelazny's] "Amber;" it's over (laughter).
>
> I realized that I did something very awkward with the ending, because some people read the ending and they assume that there'll be a book about what happens to those guys when they get into alien cyberspace. And that was basically me wimping out, wanting to give them something to do, or a few months of interesting life before the batteries run out (laughter). They've been left out somewhere in the middle of nowhere with these car batteries powering their consciousness, and it just seemed too sad (laughter).
>
> [from the floor]: Hey, don't forget the solar cells!
>
> Gibson: Yeah, they've got the solar cells, if it doesn't cloud over.... (laughter)

Having heard Gibson's view on the fate of his characters, it seems like an appropriate time to reval the ending of "The Princess Ineffabelle," because it has a kind of moral to it that warns of the perils of alephs of various sorts. After offering to download the king into his Black Box, Subtillion informs him that it is necessary to dispose of his physical body to prevent any unpleasant paradoxes, and produces "from under the bed, a heavy hammer, but serviceable"

(Lem, "Princess" 98). The king (understandably) begins to have second thoughts: "The description in the ancient volume is greatly exaggerated. She's not bad, of course, but nowhere near as beautiful as it says in the chronicles. Well, so long, old sage..." (Lem, "Princess" 98). He then flees from the cabin before the old patriarch can brain him, and promptly wakes up, "facing the bitterly disappointed Subtillion, disappointed because the King had come so close to being locked up in the Black Box, and the Lord High Thaumaturge could have kept him there forever...." (Lem, "Princess" 98-99).

The "journey into alien cyberspace" aspect of the end of Mona Lisa Overdrive is troubling, because it represents either my misreading of the ending, or a serious error on Gibson's part. Suppose for a minute that we accept Moravec's pattern-identity view of the self, and that the representations inside the aleph really are the essence of the people whose names they bear. If Bobby, Angie, the Finn and Colin have made it out of the aleph and into cyberspace, then they really have achieved a transcendence of sorts (similar to what happens to Linda Lee and the Dixie Flatline at the conclusion of Neuromancer). In a discussion of the manner in which parallel processing supercomputers like MIT's Connection Machine work, Moravec describes a scenario where a given simulation of a person would find itself defeating physical links to any one location in a piece of hardware. "[T]he simulation might find itself shuffled into entirely different sets of processors from moment to moment. The thinking process would be uninterrupted, even as its location and physical machinery changed continuously, because the pattern would be maintained" (Moravec 120). Presumably, the mechanics of life in cyberspace would work along similar principles.

However, it is impossible for Bobby and Angie to be in cyberspace, (and for the Finn to be with them) because the aleph is completely cut off from it.

> Gentry said that the Count was jacked into what amounted to a mother-huge microsoft; he thought the slab was a single solid lump of biochip. If that was true, the thing's storage capacity was virtually infinite; it would've been unthinkably expensive to manufacture. It was, Gentry said, a fairly strange thing for anyone to have built at all, although such things were rumored to exist and to have their uses, most particularly in the storage of vast amounts of confidential data. With no link to the global matrix, the data was immune to every kind of attack via cyberspace. The catch, of course, was that you couldn't access it via the matrix; it was dead storage.
> (Gibson, MLO 128)

The aleph was connected to the matrix, but only briefly; at the end of the text, it is cut off again. Therefore, either Gibson forgot that he had declared the aleph "dead storage," or the "alien cyberspace" that Angie and Bobby are traveling toward, and the versions of the Finn and Colin that accompany them, are all aspects of the aleph's simulation, and not really part of the matrix at all. "If this is aleph-class biosoft, he literally could have anything at all in there. In a sense, he could have an approximation of everything...." (Gibson, MLO 128), including approximations of alien cyberspace, and the Finn. Either possibility destroys the validity of the transcendent moment; because I have tremendous respect for Gibson as a writer, and because all evidence seems to support this conclusion, I am going under the assumption that the ending of Mona Lisa Overdrive has to be read ironically, and not as an authorial gaffe.

Adding to that irony is another passage that I think indicates that there was, in fact, a possibility for a true transcendence in Gibson's fictional world. Colin tells Kumiko in the aleph that "3Jane knew a secret about Mitchell, about Mitchell's relationship to the matrix; Mitchell, at one time, had the potential to become, well, very central to things, though it's not worth going into" (Gibson, MLO 223). When Continuity partially rewrote the vévés in her head, that possibility was destroyed. Given the position the majority of women

hold in Gibson's text, and the stances that various women theorists take on downloading, it is doubly ironic that Angie should represent that lost hope.

Gibson never provides easy answers to any of these questions, and it is precisely that quality that makes Mona Lisa Overdrive his most mature book. It exhibits a level of sophistication in both plot and technique seldom seen in SF (Samuel R. Delany being one of the few comparable names that spring to mind); it required, for me, several readings to formulate any sort of critical opinion. It may not have the white-heat intensity of Neuromancer, but it is indicative that Gibson is hitting his stride as a mature writer. His handling of the women characters in Mona Lisa is also more credible than in his earlier books. They all seem to be at least as (if not more) believable and interesting than his male characters. The gynesis relationship is still often present between them and their male counterparts--which may be inevitable in Gibson's fiction, because of the nature of his influences as a writer--but there is always at least a token resistance to that relationship, or an ironic depiction of that relationship by the author. And every now and then, there is more. When I consider all of the marginalized figures in Gibson's texts (especially the women), and their various untimely demises, and then think of the figure of Molly tiredly but triumphantly walking away from the ruins of Factory, a phrase from a comic strip entitled The Born Loser comes to mind: "Occasionally I win one."

Notes to Chapter 4

1. Gibson's texts contain a surprising number of dead, wronged mothers: Marie-France Tessier, Turner's mother, and now Kumiko's mother.

2. Bohnaker's book is remarkably sensationalistic, mean-spirited and cynical about Japanese culture. However, it is the most recent work done on the subject to date (I understand that there may be a future Re/Search issue focusing on Japanese culture). And, despite his obvious biases, Bohnaker may have some valid points, so I am nevertheless going to cite his work.

3. It is worth noting that Gibson's picture of future Japanese domestic life is occasionally even worse than Bohnaker's descriptions; while on Freeside, Case sees "three Japanese wives in Hiroshima sackcloth await[ing] sarariman husbands, their oval faces covered with artificial bruises; it was, he knew, an extremely conservative style, one he'd seldom seen in Chiba" (Gibson, Nm 128).

4. For simplicity's sake, I am simply going to refer to her as Molly for the remainder of this text.

5. Unlike many other SF writers who have extended a narrative over several books, Gibson is not afraid to develop his characters from book to book. In fact, he is likely to change their situation drastically, and to develop their personalities according to their altered circumstances. I think that when the Sprawl books are viewed as a whole, the characters are not really "flat" in the conventional sense of the word, but rather, the narrative is so fast and dense that they are "blurred." Any given snippet of text can only reveal so much about any one character. It is possible to piece together something approximating a

"round" character from fragments in the different books, but there is no real way to access "the big picture" in Gibson's fictional universe.

6. That instant comes at the very end of the text, when Molly briefly considers cutting the power to the aleph, in order to have her revenge on 3Jane.

> Darren Wershler-Henry: By the time you get to the last book, Mona Lisa, people seem to be more, I don't know, comfortable inside their own bodies. Molly, or Sally, or whatever, never unsheaths her claws throughout the whole book, and there's this kind of tension if you've read the other books.
>
> William Gibson: She gets to the point, you know, that's the thing, like, her hand is poised--a lot of people miss that--she has her hand poised over the wire, and she could just go tchk! and kill 'em all, but she doesn't. And, yeah, I think there's something...
> (Wershler-Henry, "Interview")

However, cutting off the power would not only mean the "death" of 3Jane, but also of Bobby and Angie. Molly seems to feel that given their present state (i.e. they're going to die soon anyway), they deserve a little bit of time to exist in whatever form.

7. This is the cyberpunk aesthetic: maximum information conveyed at maximum speed in minimum space, or, in the words of Mondo 2000's slogan, "How fast are you? How dense?" It also has its correlative in the hardcore punk scene usually (if often erroneously) cited as inspirational to cyberpunk fiction--"Loud Fast Rules."

8. > When he invents machines that are able to work, "think," or travel better than him or for him, there is no prosthesis--technical or mediatized--for the pleasure of being human. To achieve this, machines would require an idea of man, but for them it is already too late: it is man who invented them. This is why man can exceed what he is, while machines will never exceed what they are. . . . All machines are celibate.
> (Baudrillard, Xerox 6)

9. When Gibson is glorifying Molly as loner-hero, he places her in what appears to be exclusively male company (unless--and this is unlikely--"Sony Mao" and/or "Mickey Chiba" are women): "For a few seconds, he knew, she was every bad-ass hero, Sony Mao in the old Shaw videos, Mickey Chiba, the whole lineage back to Lee and Eastwood" (Gibson, Nm 213).

10. This concept originates with Jorge Luis Borges' short story, "The Aleph," in The Aleph and Other Stories (see bibliography for complete citation).

11. One can do a neat little association here: grail=womb ("At the same time, the Holy Grail must have been, literally, the vessel that had received and contained the blood of Jesus. In other words it had been the womb of the Magdalene" --from The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail, qtd. in Eco 377), womb=matrix: gynesis.

12. The Shape seems to be Gentry's name for the god of the matrix--the fused AIs, Neuromancer and Wintermute--which later shatters into pieces which become the loa, the god(s) of the matrix. As I argued in the first chapter of this thesis, the totality of that shape is the product of the imagination of Marie-France Tessier, and feminine in nature.

13. This cryptic outburst indicates that Gentry has some knowledge of Kabbalistic mysticism, picked up from his old books, perhaps. This is not surprising, considering that cyberpunk and a kind of gnostic-centered spirituality are closely enmeshed in the "real" world (cf. Mondo 2000 or Gnosis magazine, or the later writings of Philip K. Dick). Further, a gnostic world-view is completely consistent with Gentry's character; Elaine Pagels, in The Gnostic Gospels, describes gnosticism as "a philosophy of pessimism about the world combined with an attempt at self-transcendence" (xxx). Compare Gentry's "macrocosm/microcosm"

speech to the following passage from Jorge Luis Borges' story "The Aleph," which is the likely source for Gibson's version of the device:

> As is well known, the Aleph is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Its use for the strange sphere in my story may not be accidental. For the Kabbala, that letter stands for the En Soph, the pure and boundless godhead; it is also said that it takes the shape of a man pointing to both heaven and earth, in order to show that the lower world is the map and mirror of the higher; for Cantor's Mengenlehre, it is the symbol of transfinite numbers, of which any part is as great as the whole. (29)

Borges' choice of the phrase "map and mirror" to describe the relation of the Aleph to the world indicates the possibility of some sort of gynesis relationship. This possibility is, I think, actualized in Gibson's text, because his aleph is a kind of extension of 3Jane, which Bobby and Gentry successfully "read."

14. Moravec's ideal of the scale of this simulator is substantially different from Gibson's; he imagines it to be "made out of a superdense neutron star" (123). I was going to attribute the drastically reduced size of Gibson's aleph to poetic license, but it seems to me that both of these creations are equally improbable.

15. The smallest unit of information in a computer is called a "bit." "Physically, a bit is just a magnetic 'switch' that can be in either of two positions. You could call the two positions 'up' and 'down', or 'x' and 'o', or '1' and '0'... The third is the usual convention" (Hofstadter, Gödel 288-89). The computer is an instrument that is based on a dualistic paradigm.

16. There may be a certain element of homophobic paranoia in this speculation, but maybe not. Even if Yurick's speculation has no bearing on the Athenians, it

is certainly relevant in the case of William S. Burroughs, whose extensive influence on Gibson's writing has already been pointed out (see the Introduction to this thesis).

17. Starhawk is describing the Burroughs/Gysin/Leary/Moravec camp: "This is the Space Age, and we are Here to Go" (William Burroughs discussing Timothy Leary, in an ad for Timothy Leary's Greatest Hits; Mondo 2000 2 [Summer 1990]: 74).

18. "The Princess Ineffabelle" even has an element of gynesis about it; the king sees in the digital approximation of Ineffabelle his desire, his "other," which is literally ineffable/Ineffabelle.

Conclusion: On the "Other" End of the Story

> you want to know what it feels like to be on this end of the story?
>
> -Linda Lee addressing Case, in Candas Jane Dorsey's "ice"

Graduate school produces strange bedfellows. When I first began to see parallels between the cyberpunk SF I was reading for relaxation and the French-influenced feminist theory I happened to be studying, I was more than a little surprised. Although the parallels excited me tremendously, I hesitated for a long time before deciding to attempt to write my thesis on the subject, because I could already see objections from a number of different camps looming on the horizon. The SF fans and writers wouldn't like it, because they tend to be hostile to any type of serious postmodern critical analysis. There are very few exceptions to this rule (Joanna Russ, Samuel R. Delany, and Stanislaw Lem come to mind). The academics wouldn't like it either, because my subject matter--science fiction--wasn't "serious" enough; at least one professor asked me if I wasn't afraid that Gibson's work mightn't be sophisticated enough to merit a sustained critical analysis. I could also forsee possible objections from women writers and critics, regarding my right to speak from a feminist position. Furthermore, I encountered a fair amount of doubt from Gibson himself as to the applicability of gynesis and related ideas to his writing (see Wershler-Henry, "Queen," in bibliography). Nevertheless, I decided to proceed with the project.

My personal feeling is that this thesis (if it is successful) could help to open up new ways for looking at both SF writing and postmodern/feminist literary theory. If the SF texts I am discussing do not fall apart under the close scrutiny of serious academic study, perhaps they will be reconsidered as more

than examples of "mere" genre fiction. If the critical apparatus I am applying does in fact demonstrate some relevance to the SF texts being studied, by pointing out aspects of those works that may have been overlooked, then maybe some interest in postmodern/feminist critical theory may develop outside of academic circles.

If Gibson (or any of his many loyal fans) ever chances to read this thesis, I hope it will not be construed by them as an attack. My intent was/is not to condemn anything, but to facilitate the opening of a dialogue between two fields that are still very separate. I derived this notion chiefly from the opinions Jane Gallop expresses in the Introduction to The Daughter's Seduction:

> The notions of integrity and closure in a text are like that of virginity in a body. They assume that if one does not respect the boundaries between inside and outside, one is "breaking and entering," violating a property. As long as the fallacies of integrity and closure are upheld, a desire to penetrate becomes a desire for rape. I hope to engage in some intercourse with these textual bodies that has a different economy, one in which entry and interpenetration does not mean disrespect or violation because they are not based on the myth of the book's or the self's or the body's virginal wholeness. But rather upon the belief that, if words there be or body there be, somewhere there is a desire for dialogue, intercourse, exchange. (xiii)

Doubtless there are people who will disagree with my readings of Gibson's texts; I would be interested in hearing their ideas. I am sure I will continue to fine-tune my position on Gibson's writing (and other cyberpunk works) as I learn more about various feminisms and about the new SF.

I don't wish to become a part of the anti-cyberpunk witchhunt that is currently raging through the pages of the SF journals[1], or to dictate how any artist should go about writing anything, but I do feel that there is plenty of room for discussion about the role of women in the cyberpunk (sub)genre. Until the articles by Jessica Amanda Salmonson and Gwyneth Jones in the recent issue

of The New York Review of Science Fiction, precious little had been said at all. Salmonson and Jones are arguing that cyberpunk, like the last major SF movement, the British "New Wave," has "nothing new to offer any female character except the privilege of getting fucked over" (Jones 10):

> [Delany] bolsters the common cyberpunk delusion of feminism in his belief that, without the feminists, "there wouldn't be any cyberpunk. It [feminism] lights the whole cyberpunk movement." He may be correct, but only insofar as a reactionary literature requires something to react against. Delany in essence mistook the presence of futuristic Amazons in cyberpunk as inherently feminist; but one only needs to look at the proliferation of Amazons in men's comic books to understand fully why such a "feminist" phenomenon has nothing whatsoever to do with women, for which reason women are notable only by their lack of presence among the Sci Fi Eye fraternity.
> (Salmonson 1 in n. 1)

Essentially, Salmonson is talking about gynesis. She argues that the label "feminist" has been appropriated by a group of male writers as a sign of their "radical" venture into previously unexplored territory, and that, on closer examination, there is no basis for this claim, because the image of "woman" that the cyberpunks hold up is just that: an image. Perhaps this thesis will help to expand on this portion of the debate.

Whether or not I have the right to utilize a feminist discourse is another matter. When I expressed my uncertainties about this situation to another student, a woman I did a considerable amount of work with in my first graduate year, she bluntly suggested that I Put Up Or Shut Up, and let the writing speak for itself. While I feel that it would be glib to leave that statement as the sole defense for my position, I also think that there is a certain amount of value in her suggestion, because it implies that doing the tremendous amount of work involved (internal ideological struggles included) in a serious feminist critique is what is most important. I am trying to live up to the agenda Alice

Jardine presents for men working with feminism in the Men In Feminism collection: "If you will forgive me my directness, we do not want you to mimic us, to become the same as us; we don't want your pathos or your guilt; and we don't even want your admiration (even if it's nice to get it once in a while). What we want, I would even say what we need, is your work" (60). As I said in my Introduction, I hope that this thesis will not be interpreted as an appropriation of feminist discourse. I prefer to think that I have borrowed portions of it for a little while, and paid back the loan with some interest.

While this thesis is drawing to a close (more because of limitations of time and space rather than lack of things to say), I doubt that my work on Gibson and the other cyberpunks is finished. In fact, I plan to examine several other cyberpunk texts with the same analytical tools I have used here in the near future. I am constantly surprised that in a (sub)genre that is supposed to be so avant-garde, there is so much consistency between authors in the definition of sex-roles, the importance placed on bodies, and the relations that those bodies have to various technologies. Occasionally, the similarities to Gibson's original vision are downright shameful, as in the case of Walter Jon Williams' Hardwired. Williams' book features a male protagonist named Cowboy, who pilots an extremely high-tech vehicle called a Panzer by jacking himself into something called the Interface, and a female ex-prostitute lead who wears mirrorshades (Williams' choice of words, not mine) and has her body cybernetically augmented for combat. There is also a character named Reno who used to be a jockey like Cowboy, but now exists solely as a rogue program within the world computer network... Gibson should sue the guy. Although the work of other identifiably "cyberpunk" writers--and here I am thinking especially of K. W. Jeter, Bruce Sterling, Jack Womack, Richard Kadrey, Rudy Rucker, and Vernor Vinge--is

(thankfully) not as derivative as Williams', there is still great potential for reading their books through Alice Jardine's theory of gynesis, or through the work of other feminist thinkers that deal with the politics of the body. Similarly, there is also a need to augment the work Jardine has begun on the predecessors of the cyberpunk writers: Thomas Pynchon, William S. Burroughs, J. G. Ballard, and their ilk.

...And then there is the matter of the writing with identifiably cyberpunk characteristics that is being done by women. Kathy Acker's Empire of the Senseless is a book that is obviously related to questions of body markings from the dedication--"This book is dedicated to my tattooist"--onward. A portion of Empire, "Nightmare City," is actually a rewriting of the opening section of Neuromancer. Candas Jane Dorsey's "Learning About Machine Sex," the companion three-day novel written with Nora Abercrombie, Hardwired Angel, and an unfinished piece called "ice" that features a dead Linda Lee telling the story of her love affairs with both Case and Molly, are all worthy of further investigation. There is also a writer named Rachael Pollack, whose story "Burning Sky" appears in Semiotext(e) SF (presumably, there are others as well, but I haven't encountered their work yet). Much of this writing is in reaction to cyberpunk's more embarrassing ideological baggage, pointing out the genre's faults in an extremely ironic manner. But these writers also make cyberpunk do wild, unexpected things, taking off in directions completely unforseen by their male peers. This is especially true of the writing of Kathy Acker. I would have written more about the relationship her fiction has to Gibson's if I thought I could have done it justice, but I'm a long way from that stage right now. Even more difficult to work out than the connections between her writing and Gibson's is the relationship her writing bears to feminist theory; some feminist

bookshops place her writing with the men's, or refuse to carry her books at all.

In the final analysis, I think that this thesis was worth writing for my own sake as a student of both feminist theory and popular culture, because it required me to do research in both fields to a greater extent than I had previously. No doubt I have made some mistakes along the way, but I am reasonably happy with the start I have made. Hopefully, the people who read this will find something that will encourage them to look further into some of the issues I have attempted to deal with here.

> I should probably mention at this point that I do not know specifically what the message here is, if indeed there is one. It probably has something to do with the way things work out and the perception we have of how and why things work out the way they do. . . .
>
> When all is said and done, when all the shouting and philosophizing and moralizing is over, I suspect that this tale is simply another example of something.

-A. C. Weisbecker, Cosmic Banditos (193)

Darren S. Wershler-Henry
30 July 1990
Winnipeg

Notes to the Conclusion

1. See Lucy Sussex's piece, "Falling Off the Fence," and Russell Blackford's "Skiffy and Mimesis" (both listed in bibliography) for summaries of the ongoing literary debate as to the worth of cyberpunk, especially Gibson.

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